PEEPS AT NATURE

BIRD LIFE OF THE SEASONS

To Betty.
From Dad.
Christmas 1932
CHS.

PEEPS AT NATURE

EDITED BY

THE REV. CHARLES A. HALL, F.R.M.S.

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Edited by the Rev. CHARLES A. HALL, F.R.M.S.
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By the REV. CHARLES A. HALL, F.R.M.S.

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CUCKOO.
Adult (Below), Young (Above).

BIRD LIFE
OF THE SEASONS

BY

W. PERCIVAL WESTELL, F.L.S.
AUTHOR OF "NATURAL HISTORY OF THE GARDEN," ETC.

WITH

SIXTEEN FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
EIGHT OF WHICH ARE IN COLOUR

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INTRODUCTORY EDITORIAL NOTE

THIS little book, written by one who is an expert ornithologist and close observer of birds as they are in a state of nature, is not intended to be an exhaustive catalogue of British Birds, or a guide to a museum collection; neither is it designed to encourage the harrying of nests or dissection of limp and lifeless specimens. The author's object is to give the reader a peep into bird-life as it is lived, to present a picture of some of our winged friends in their natural surroundings. In perusing the following pages, the sympathetic reader cannot fail to be impressed with a sense of romance in the lives of the birds, a sense which, it is hoped, will be further stimulated by the joy of actual observation. The true naturalist is keen to observe living creatures in their habitats without disturbing them, and prosecutes his studies without wanton destruction.

The publishers desire to express their indebtedness to Messrs. Watkins and Doncaster, Strand, London, for their kindness in lending the birds' eggs which are pictured on Plate XIII.

CHARLES A. HALL.

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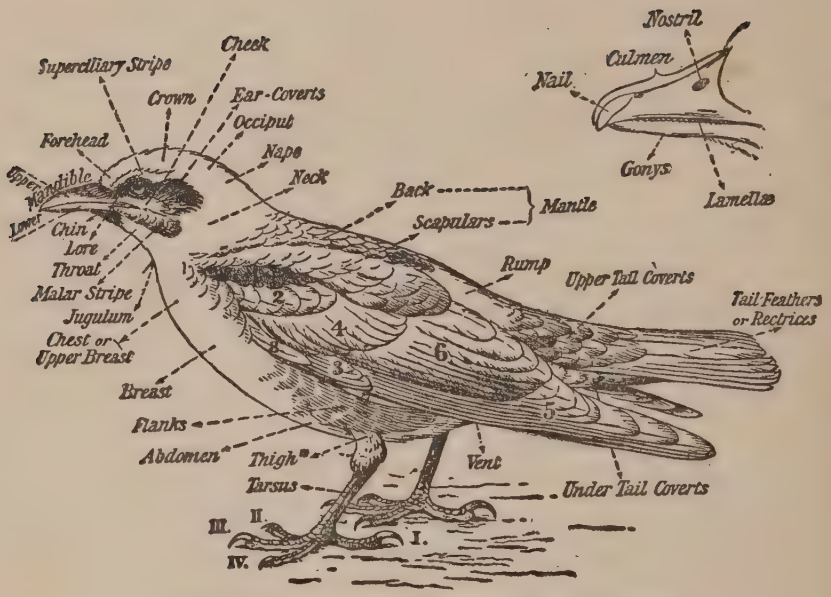


DIAGRAM SHOWING THE TOPOGRAPHY OF A BIRD.

WING.
1. Lesser Coverts.
2. Median „
3. Primary „ } Greater or Major Coverts.
4. Secondary „
5. Primaries } Quills, Remiges, or Flight feathers.
6. Secondaries
7. Bastard-Primary.
8. „ Wing.

LEG.
Tarsus.
Ist or hind toe.
IInd or inner toe.
IIIrd or middle toe.
IVth or outer toe.

* This joint is the heel proper, but is commonly called the thigh.

BIRD LIFE OF THE SEASONS

CHAPTER I

BIRDS OF THE SPRING

Who does not know them, and who with soul so dead as to love them not? True, many yet exist among us to whom the personalities of the airy creatures of the fields, woods, and hedgerows are but little known or imperfectly understood, and their melodious voices and cheery songs in the chill, grey, gloomy days of the slowly returning Spring impress themselves upon even the casual ear, and beget familiarity with certain lilting strains and snatches of song, which linger in the memory as cherished friends; whilst the humble and oft-times unobtrusive performer remains unknown, or the object of the merest nodding acquaintance. To extend the knowledge of the author of the song, and thereby add to the pleasure and interest in the performance, is our present aim.

Long before the calendar informs us that the Ides of Spring are at hand, or the vagrant Cuckoo, and all the wandering hosts that will invade our shores and

spread over the face of the country have dreamed of leaving the sunny southern climes for their Summer's sojourn among us, our hardy resident birds are responding to the stirring impulses of the season, and obtruding their presence more and more clearly upon our ears. In the opening days of the year that favourite of the poet's, the "blithesome and cumberless" Lark, will take advantage of any brief spell of mild, sunny weather to soar the empyrean heights and send down a roundelay of rollicking music which is plainly suggestive of the mirth and gladness that is moving within its soul. Under the eaves the "che-ilp, che-ilp" of the homely Sparrow, varied anon with boisterous bickerings in the hedgerow or by the roadside, and the rasping, metallic "see-saw, see-saw" of the Great Tit in the orchard, tell the same tale. In these early days of the year one of the most novel bird sounds, almost weird in its distinctness, is an occasional piping strain which pierces the murky blackness of the night. It is the sober and demure Hedge Accentor, who now joins the small company of feathered choristers of the night, though he waits not for fair Luna's silvery light, as do most of his nocturnal competitors, and is content with voicing a brief strain now and again. Can it be that the quickening impulse of the approaching Spring disturbs his slumbers with vivid dreams of the love conquests that are so soon to follow, and induces unconscious outbursts of song?

It is about the middle of February that the Spring

songs of the birds become most obvious to the casual observer, for at such time they are to be heard on every side in rapidly increasing strength and fulness, until reinforced by the arrival of the Spring migrants, who swell Nature's choir to its full capacity. From their pert cries and demeanour it is clear that their thoughts, like those of some other bipeds, begin to "turn to thoughts of love," but the time is not just yet. To take the bird voices of the Spring in the order in which they become familiar to our ears would be a difficult and misleading task. We will therefore put them in alphabetical order, and give precedence to one which can scarcely claim a high position among feathered musicians.

Corn Bunting.—This bird is one of our most widely distributed Buntings, and also the largest of his race, from which fact, rather than his numerical abundance, he has got the name of the Common Bunting. He is a notable bird as he perches a-top the ridges in the ploughed field or any slight eminence in the meadows, and this gives colour to another of its local names—the Clod Bird. But whence comes the uncommon cognomen of Stocking-Weaver? Scarcely, one would imagine, from its ungainly habit of dangling its legs at the commencement of its whirring flight until it gets fairly under way. Its vocal performances have been variously described as resembling the jingling of a chain, the breaking of glass, and the wheezing inspirations of a bronchial subject. But he has one peculiarity possessed by few of his kindred, for, when moving

about upon the ground, his gait is both walking and hopping.

The nest is placed on or near the ground in the hedgerow, and sometimes in a clump of coarse grass in the middle of a field, and contains four to six dull white eggs, streaked and blotched with purplish-brown. The sexes are alike in colour—dark-brown above, streaked and spotted with a darker hue, lighter brown below, with spotted sides and whitish throat.

Yellow Bunting.—Unlike his sober and retiring relative, the Yellow Hammer, as it is popularly called, thrusts itself and its expressive song upon our notice throughout the Spring and early Summer. Who does not know the bold and spirited strain which is so easily syllabized as to be found in various forms in the vernacular of almost any district. To the Midlander it sings the pleading strain: "A little bit o' bread and *no* cheese;" whilst in the same strain the native of the fells and braes of the north-west counties hears only the base insult: "The de'il tak' ye a' and leave me." These renderings convey a very tolerable idea of the song. No wonder the rustic in some parts avers that the bird has a drop of Satan's blood in its veins. But let the winds blow cold and chill in the early Spring days, and our yellow-headed friend incontinently drops his "cheese," and cuts his song short at the penultimate syllable, which is always strongly emphasized. It has the reputation in some quarters of invariably singing at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Photo, Stanley Crook.

Young Cuckoo being fed by Meadow Pipit. *P.* 33.

Photo, E. Hanley.

Nest and Eggs of Yellow Bunting. *P.* 5.

His actions are as saucy as his song, for, after regaling himself shamelessly upon the farmer's spring-sown wheat or oats, he goes with a slow, wheeling flight to the hedge, and, alighting with a jerk of the tail, straightway seems bent on commending one and all to perdition. Still, if he does take a toll on the grain at times, he also devours a vast number of insect pests; and, on the principle that the labourer is worthy of his hire, we must not begrudge Golden Gladdy, as he is prettily called in some parts, a share of that which he has saved from more subtle enemies.

In appearance the head, neck, and breast are almost wholly sulphur-yellow, streaked more or less with olive-brown. In Summer the head of the male often becomes pure yellow, and in Winter the darker streaks are more abundant. The back is a dark olive-brown, becoming slightly ruddy towards the tail, and the sides are mottled with yellow and brown. His mate is less gaudily attired, as becomes a staid little housekeeper, who often rears three broods of three to five in a year, and may be found nesting as late as September.

The nest (see Plate II.) is a neat affair placed near, or on, the ground in a hedge-bank, which, if covered with straggling brambles, bracken, and coarse grass, affords an ideal situation, in which the homestead is very cunningly concealed. The eggs are greyish-white, with purplish-brown spots and streaks and zigzag markings, which have been likened to attempts at forming letters or Arabic characters, and have given

the bird one of its local names in the term Writing-Master.

Chiff-Chaff.—This little bird may truly be called the harbinger of Spring, for it is one of our very earliest migrants, and when we hear the "chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff" of the "Chivvy-Chank," as many bird-lovers call him, sounding along the hedgerows and in the woodlands towards the end of March, the expressive notes give us joy and gladness by their association with the pleasures of Spring, which will soon be with us. Strange that so small a creature, less than 5 inches over all, should be among the first to brave the rigours of our Spring clime. Yet it is true, and the "till-tell-true, chink-chunk," as his song has been rendered, is not without a cheerful, merry note, even if it does become monotonous from constant repetition.

The Chiff-Chaff is clad in varying tones of olive and sage greens, and builds its oval-shaped nest on banks low down near the ground, cosily lining it with feathers, and depositing a clutch of from five to seven whitish eggs with specks of purplish-red.

Cuckoo.—But the true herald of Spring by common consent is undoubtedly the Cuckoo, whose vagrant wandering voice is universally known and eagerly listened for by one and all. This bird is pictured on Plate I. It is a study in grey and white, the upper parts being slate-grey, approaching a bluish-grey shade on the head and neck, and ashy-grey over the

upper parts of body, wings, and tail generally. The lower parts are whitish, with blackish bars, giving it a very Hawk-like appearance, and the wings and tail are tipped with white. It arrives in April and leaves again in August. Its voice varies with the season. In April and May we hear the familiar "cuck-oo," which latter gradually becomes a slurred and stammering chuckle, and is quite lost before the bird leaves our shores.

From first to last the morals of the Gowk, as the Scotch call it, are lax in the extreme, for it commences its career in the nest where it has been brought into being by devoted foster-parents, by carefully ejecting its foster brothers and sisters to die of cold and starvation, and in later life it is parasitical upon other species, in whose nests it deposits its eggs to be hatched and reared by the chosen victims. Neither is it particular as to what species it victimizes, for its egg has been discovered in the nests of no less than 120 different species, though the Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, and Hedge Accentor are the most frequent victims. The egg is very small for the size of the bird, and varies in colour probably more than that of any other British bird, save, perhaps, the Guillemot.

An old rhyme gives this prophetic advice to the farmer:—

> "When the Cuckoo comes to the bare thorn,
> Sell your cow and buy your corn;
> But when she comes to the full leaf,
> Sell your corn and buy your sheep."

Dipper.—A curiosity in several ways is Benny Ducker, alias Water Thrush, alias Water Ouzel, and many other terms, as the Dipper is variously called. With his blackish-brown head, dark grey back, brown breast, and white cravat, as the crescent patch of white on the chest may be likened unto, he is one of our most interesting feathered natives. He is a bird of the wilderness and rushing waters. A waterfall, or rushing mountain-burn, is his favourite dwelling-place, and there he lives in solitary peace with only his mate for a companion, and nests and rears his broods, the nest often being placed behind the roaring cascade of water falling from an overhanging rocky bed. Though not a web-footed bird, he is as much at home in the water as on land, and floats, and swims, and dives, and even flies under water, yet he never plunges in headlong, but walks about the brink and wades unconcernedly in until out of his depth, as though air and water were as one with him. His short and cheery song mingles with the bubbling of the brook or roar of the rushing torrent, as he pursues his quest after small molluscs, snails, aquatic insects, and fish fry, which form its sustenance.

Although the nest is domed and deep, the fine white eggs are pear-shaped, after the manner of birds which lay their eggs on flat, exposed places, in which particular it forms an exception to the general rule.

Green Woodpecker.—No wonder the Popinjay, which localism is introduced into one of the im-

mortal Waverley novels by Sir Walter Scott, is also called the Woodspite, and the woodman thinks it fits the subject by the way the bird uses his chisel of a bill to hammer out a hollow in a tree in which to build his nest, as well as his constant tap-tap-tapping and hammering out sound and unsound timber alike all the livelong day, wherever insect or larvæ are likely to be secreted. Unless one is a keen observer and possesses the gift of remaining quite still and watching, the Yaffle remains hidden from view on the other side of the trunk as he works his way up it, partly supported by his stiff, wiry tail, tap-tapping as he ascends, and woe betide any insect or destructive caterpillar that crosses his path. But the slightest movement gives him alarm, when away he goes with a loud "hiu-hiu-hiu" laughing scream which resounds through the woods and makes the welkin ring with wild music. In the Spring days its laughing voice is heard ringing out peal on peal of random joy. It is believed in many parts that its laughing note is a sign of coming wet weather. In some parts of the country the Lesser Spotted is the commonest of the Woodpeckers, and the Greater Spotted is also a resident, though its numbers are added to by migrants, and it is also more shy and difficult of approach than its smaller relative. Mr. Cullen, a Somerset field naturalist, asserts that the nesting sites of these species may be distinguished in the absence of the birds by these measurements. That of the Great Spotted is 2 inches in diameter, and

about 15 inches deep, the Lesser Spotted is $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches diameter and 11 or twelve inches deep, and that of the Green species is $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, and 18 to 24 inches deep. The latter lays a clutch of from 4 to 7 glossy white eggs.

GREENFINCH.—Who does not know the Green Bird which can generally be bought at a bird-shop for two coppers, and is therefore most frequently the initiation of the bird-lover into bird-keeping. But it is as a wild free creature that we consider him now, and in our list of Spring birds he figures more on account of his curious antics than his song, not that he cannot sing at all, but truth compels us to assert that he is not a great musician, although he has a pretty, twittering note.

He is a rather sociable fellow, but shy and distrustful of man, albeit a glutton after his sown seeds and grains, and the swelling buds of his choice fruit-trees, among which he works great havoc, and is not always suspected of being the real culprit. His inconspicuous appearance protects him, and doubtless much of his work is laid to the charge of the Sparrow. His curious drooping, gliding, and twisting feats on the wing in the early Spring are merely his method of conveying to the fair sex that he "wishes to correspond with a view to marriage." His call is a rather harsh but Canary-like "tweet," and the eggs of his spouse also much resemble those of that domesticated species. For photograph of this bird's nest and eggs, see Plate III.

HEDGE ACCENTOR.—It is indeed curious how the

term Hedge Sparrow is persistently applied to this, our only resident Accentor. It is so singularly un-Sparrow-like in form, colour, habits, and manner that it is difficult to tell how it became possessed of the name. Though not a handsome bird, it is very neat and trim in its quiet garb of greyish-brown, with ashy-blue tints on the throat and breast. Far more Robin-like is it in general characteristics, but, unlike that bold fellow, is most shy and retiring in disposition.

Note its shuffling, hoppy gait along the hedgerows which it loves so well. It has given Dick Dunnock, as he is called, the name of Shuffle-Wing. The localism Hedge Chanter suits him better, for from the hedgerow he chants his eminently sprightly lilting lay, so suggestive in many points of the song of the Redbreast, from early morn till dewy eve, and again breaks out in snatches of song during the still watches of the night. And his song is heard almost the whole year round. In the early spring days it is a great acquisition to our avian choir, and is given abundantly in the early morning from the hedge-top hard by the spot selected for the cradle of his future brood or, maybe, underneath which his mate is already sitting. For he is one of our earliest small birds to begin nesting, and the beautiful torquoise-blue eggs may be found in his very trim built nest of twigs, moss, dry grass, and wool, lined with hair, in the early days of March—wind and weather permitting.

Jackdaw.—Who has not met the sable Jackdaw

—if not in its wholly unreclaimed wild state, at least in the semi-domesticated state in which it is so often met with in country districts, trained to fly about at liberty and return to its rightful owner's premises. To the uninitiated he is so like the Rook, but is readily distinguished by the greyish colour of his nape and by his smaller size. He is a sociable creature, and elects to dwell in colonies of his own kith and kin, and preferably in some old tower, belfry, or ruins of some kind. Its nest is an untidy conglomeration of miscellaneous material placed in its usual haunts or any hole in wall or chimney, but sometimes in a tree, or even a rabbit-burrow.

In the female the greyish nape is rather obscure. Its usual note is the familiar "kak," popularly interpreted as "Jack," but domesticated individuals possess great mimicking powers, and may even be taught to articulate words of human speech.

The food consists of all kinds of offal, insects, reptiles, mice, and young birds. When they have young in the nest they will frequently steal the callow nestlings from the nests of the Sparrows or other small birds as food for their own young. It is believed that when the young are left in the nest until a fortnight old the parents will not breed again that year.

The famous Jackdaw of Rheims, which appeared "not a penny the worse" for ecclesiastical ban and censure, is not the only one that has figured in history and literature. Macrobius tells us that in the reign of

Young Red-Backed-Shrike. *P.* 16.

Photo, T. Malloch.

Nest and Eggs of Greenfinch. *P.* 10.

Augustus Cæsar several Jackdaws were trained to salute him verbally, and their owners richly rewarded.

Kestrel (Plate IV.).—One of the common sights of the country in the days of Spring is a bird hovering motionless on outspread pinions in mid air, or, at least, motionless so far as the eye can detect, hanging there in perfect repose, like a toy figure of a bird suspended by a string in a perfect calm. It looks, as Scott has expressed it, "as if let down from the heavens there by a viewless silken thread." When man has completed his mastery over the air and evolved the perfect aeroplane, we shall the better understand the Kestrel's power, for such the bird is, or, as he is better known to the countryman, the Stannel Hawk, or the Wind-hover. The latter name suits him well, for he really seems to hover on the wind—head to the wind, and tail slightly spread, now, anon, a few strokes of the wings, a glide, and another motionless hover. His keen eye, as he hovers up there, is minutely searching the ground below for signs of prey, on which he will descend with the swiftness of an arrow shot from a bow, dealing death and destruction to the unfortunate Mouse, Mole, Rat, or Frog, which comes within range of his acute vision. A variety of other harmful insects and reptiles form his food. He is one of the farmer's best friends, and not nearly so black as he is often painted, having in some measure to suffer for the misdeeds of the Sparrow Hawk. These, however, need not detain us now. He is our commonest

Falcon, and possesses a screaming, half-laughing, chattering cry.

When it makes a nest for itself it chooses a hole in a cliff, or shelving rock, deserted chimney, or tower, and constructs its home of twigs and heather, with a lining of grass, but it generally takes advantage of an old nest of Crow, Pigeon, or Magpie, and lays four to six eggs of a pale reddish-brown ground colour mottled with a darker hue.

Pied Wagtail.—Few prettier sights are to be met with than the dapper little Wagtail—the Water Wagtail, as this species is called—running about brook-sides or margins of ponds and lakes, or in the meadows popping in and out and round about the feet of the grazing cattle. In the latter situation the association, ludicrous though it appears on the face of it, is mutually beneficial, for the bird is busy feeding upon the flies and numerous small creatures which are disturbed by the movements of the cattle as they slowly move along, and, being caught and devoured by Nanny Wagtail, are prevented from further torturing their four-footed victims. By the waterside its ceaseless quest is on a similar mission bent, save that the disturbing agents are not always there to rouse into activity the many water-haunting insects and molluscs which it seeks.

At this season it adds a pretty, low warbling song, only audible at fairly close quarters, to its usual loud hurried warble, and its call note, which has been

syllabized as "which-is-it." It runs about briskly, with a constant bobbing of the tail as though to maintain its balance, which gives it its popular name, though why it should be called the "Washer-Woman," or "Peggy Wash-Dish," is somewhat obscure. It is popularly, albeit erroneously, referred to as the smallest bird that walks—a distinction more correctly belonging to the Meadow Pipit. Its nest is placed in a hole in a bank or wall, among heaps of stones, stacks of wood, or among the straggling roots of a tree, and sometimes under the cover of a haystack, and is composed of dry grass, leaves, and moss, and lined with hair, feathers, and wool. It lays four or five eggs, and two or three broods are produced in one year.

Redwing.—In the fields and meadows is still to be found a very Thrush-like bird, about the size of our Song Thrush, which appeared there in the autumn and has remained with us through our inclement winter. As he hops about in search of the many insect pests which haunt the pastures and provide food for him and his kindred, he may be readily distinguished from our mellow-throated Throstle by a white eye-stripe, and reddish patches on the flanks. It is the Redwing, often called, in his native haunts, the Norway Nightingale. It has a rich, mild, flute-like, trilling song, which in its Summer haunts may in large measure warrant the title thus bestowed upon him. But he will not stay with us beyond the early days of Spring. About the end of April or in May he will disappear,

and return once more to the pine forests of the far North, where he spends the Summer and rears his broods.

Red-Backed Shrike. — The Red-Backed Shrike (Plate III.) is the commonest of the butchers amongst us, and the term well fits his murderous character. Wandering about the country lanes or in the fields, you come upon a thorn bush, and maybe accidentally descry a buzzing bluebottle fly impaled upon a thorn, and wonder how it got there. Further search reveals a large array of similar outrages—a Caterpillar here, a wee Frog there, and perhaps a callow nestling of some smaller bird in another place, and sundry Bluebottles, Beetles, and insects of many kinds, all impaled upon thorns on the selfsame bush. It is the murderous work of the Butcher Bird, and the bush is his so-called larder. When he captures his prey, if not consumed at once, it is brought to the larder and thus impaled.

The nest is composed of moss, grass, roots, down, or wool, and contains four to six eggs. These are yellowish-white, marked with light brown or ash-grey at the larger end.

Rook.—Although sometimes miscalled a Crow, the Rook, or White-Faced Crow, as he is also termed, is one of our best known birds. His gregarious habits, and dwelling in large communities year in year out, and preferably near the abode of mankind, will not permit him to be overlooked, even if the pande-

PLATE 4.

MALE AND FEMALE KESTREL.

monium of harsh cries and caws emanating from the colony at sundown did not thrust itself upon our auricular senses. His purplish-black coat, with blue reflections, is quite unrelieved save by the patch of whitish bare skin round the base of the bill, which serves to distinguish him from his more sinister relative—the Crow—in the adult stage. Prior to the first moult, however, the Rook's head is perfectly feathered.

The nest is built in colonies in the tops of tall trees, and through being repaired and added to for use year after year, often assumes very large proportions. It is an untidy mass of sticks and twigs plastered with mud, and lined with grass, moss, and wool. It has a deep cavity, in which are deposited three to five greenish eggs, mottled and blotched with darker shades of brownish-green.

The Rook is quite an omnivorous feeder, but prefers a diet of insects, farm and garden pests, small animals, and offal of various kinds, whenever available, and is, taken all round, a real friend of the farmer. It is a great devourer of wireworm, and loves the fat larvæ of the cockchafer.

One old proverb has it that Rooks will only build their nests near houses where the inmates are of a kindly, generous disposition ; whilst another avers that the desertion of a rookery augurs an impending calamity to the owner or his family fortunes. In some northern places it is supposed to be a bird of evil omen, and to

bring dire misfortune upon the occupants of any house into which it is brought, either alive or dead. Rook parliaments and executions are believed to be occasional grim realities, in which the community assembles in solemn conclave to try, sentence, and execute some unfortunate culprit whose misdeeds have outraged the morals of the staid Rook community. Yet he combines to guard himself against mankind, and whether at home in the tree tops or foraging in the fields, certain members are told off to act as sentries and keep watch, to prevent the flock being surprised by an enemy.

Skylark.—Apart from the simple but characteristic note of the Cuckoo, no country sound is better known or more truly loved than the song of the Lark. Few birds have been such universal favourites with the poets. Shelley, describing his song as welling forth from a privacy of glorious light, says: "All that ever was joyous and fresh and fair thy music doth surpass." How beautifully this recalls the merry Spring-time when from high above our heads the blithesome Lark—

> "Quavering his clear notes in the quiet air,
> While the pleased heavens her fairest livery wears."

Its song at this season is such "harmonious madness," to again quote the words of Shelley, that the very boldest may well pause ere attempting to describe it. It has been syllabized, but we will not presume to corrupt the mental picture of the real performance.

It is eminently a ground-loving bird, living and nesting upon the ground, and rarely perching. Its nest is a mere hollow, such as may be caused by the hoof of a grazing animal, and is lined with grass, and generally chosen beneath a clump of growing grass or herbage. Yet it is by no means easy to discover, or even to re-discover, once it has been found and left. The Skylark lays four or five eggs whitish or yellowish-grey in ground colour, spotted and freckled with darker grey and brown.

Its food consists mostly of insects, varied in the Winter by seeds, vegetables, and grain. So well-known is this little minstrel that it has few local names given to it. The commonest is the term Laverock, by which it is generally known in Scotland.

Its first cousin, the Woodlark, possesses in the main the same features as the Skylark, differing mostly in being rather smaller in size, having a shorter tail, perching freely upon trees and hedges, and not soaring so high in the air. Its song bears a general resemblance to that of the Skylark, but has less power and compass, and it may often be heard until late at night, even at times all night long.

Song Thrush.—This favourite bird is the Throstle of the poets, and the Mavis of the folk ayant the silvery Tweed. It is universally well known, and the bird of the light buffish breast covered with distinct blackish triangular spots needs no further description. Without his ringing, varied, and expressive song the

Spring would want one of its greatest charms. Its voice is exceedingly rich, mellow, and powerful. Few bird-songs are more easily syllabized. One version is "Judy, judy, judy; bo-peep, bo-peep, bo-peep, bo-peep; how d'ye do? how d'ye do?"

Its nest will often be found about March, long before there is sufficient leafage on the hedges to hide it from view. At this season the bird seems particularly careless in building its nest in exposed places, and the cleverly built mud-lined structure and its blue, black-spotted eggs frequently suffer from marauders in consequence.

The Thrush is exceptionally fond of snails, which it carries to some convenient spot, generally a slab of stone, and hammers off the shell, returning again and again to the same stone, so that in process of time a heap of broken shells accumulates at his workshop. Earthworms, slugs, larvæ, and insects of many kinds, and berries, including strawberries and cherries in season, complete its diet.

Common Snipe.—Known also as the Heather-Bleat, Summer Lamb and Full Snipe, two of which names clearly refer to the curious "bleating," or "drumming," noise produced by the male in the nesting season as he swoops down from a height in the air with quivering wings and expanded tail.

It is a creature of lonely, swampy wastes, where it may be found in the Spring rising with its "chizzick" note, and, anon, descending with its bleating noise. As

Photo, G. W. Webster.

Swallow at Nest. *P.* 36.

it rises from the ground it has a peculiar zigzagging flight until it gets under way. Its nest is placed in a depression on the ground under a tuft of grass or herbage, and consists of a few blades of grass and sedge, always in the swampy places it loves to inhabit. Four greenish-olive eggs are laid, blotched and spotted with shades of brown. The plumage is made up of mottled-black and chestnut-brown, with white underneath.

Willow Warbler.—A characteristic Spring sound is the song of the little Willow Warbler—truly a rich and powerful strain from such a tiny throat. The bird arrives close upon the influx of the Chiff-Chaff. Its song has been syllabized as: "Twin, twin, twin, tin, tin, tin, tin, twee, twee, twee, twee, twee, twai, twai," given on a descending scale. In it there is something suggestive of the most cheerful strains of the Robin.

Its near relative the Wood Warbler follows close in its wake, and bears much similarity to the Willow Warbler. But they may be distinguished by the slightly superior size and yellow eye-stripe of the Wood Warbler and its call-note "dear, dear, dear," against the greenish eye-stripe and call of "chit" of the Willow Warbler. Small insects form the diet of both species, and both build a semi-domed nest on or near the ground in hedges or on banks, and lay five to seven eggs of a whitish colour speckled with reddish dots. But whilst the Willow Wren uses a profusion of feathers in its homestead, in that of the Wood Wren these are conspicuous by their absence.

Wryneck.—From arriving in this country at, or very near, the same time as the Cuckoo the Wryneck is popularly known as the Cuckoo's Mate, though it possesses also many more local names, among the most common of which is Snake Bird, from the peculiar twisting motion of its long neck and hissing noise sometimes emitted by the bird ; Tongue Bird, from its long extensile tongue, and Emmet Hunter, from its habit of seeking out ant-hills to prey upon the proverbially busy occupants, which are one of its favourite articles of diet, and for the capture of which its extensile tongue is specially designed by Nature. Its call-note is a high-pitched, resounding, oft-repeated one resembling the words, "Oh! dear, dear, dear, dear, dear." The nest is built in a hole in a tree formed by natural decay, and the only material used is a few chips of the decayed wood, on which its eggs, six to ten in number, of a glossy white colour and oval shape, are deposited.

In general colour the Wryneck is brown and reddish-grey above, with dull white on the under parts, but there are curious dark markings which give the bird a very characteristic appearance when seen close at hand.

With this bird we conclude our review of a few of the more popular bird sights and sounds of the Spring —not by any means an exhaustive list, but one that embraces the most distinctive heralds of returning life and light in the great world of Nature, and which, seen and heard with increased knowledge and interest, must add to one's enjoyment of the whole.

CHAPTER II

BIRDS OF THE SUMMER

Once the voice of the Cuckoo is heard in the land, and the graceful, flitting, swerving, and anon, hesitating, and gliding, aerial evolutions of the Swallow tribe command our admiration and beggar description, the march of Spring into Summer is rapid and brilliant.

A glorious pageantry develops and unfolds new beauties day by day, affording to the sympathetic observer an endlessly changeful panorama of moving life, and colour, and music, such as the art of man cannot devise, and giving to one and all untold joy. For, during this grand triumphal march of Nature from Winter's repose to the ecstasy of Summer, none can help lending at least a casual eye and ear to the chorus of Nature ringing and swinging on every side.

The merry twitter of the newly arrived Swallow, as though o'erjoyed to renew acquaintance with old familiar scenes; the wild joy of the Throstle, and the studied, measured, flute-like notes of the Blackbird; the ceaseless warbling of the Lark, and the forceful and energetic strains of the Finches, all reveal the spontaneous joy and pleasure in living which Nature inspires in the breasts of her faithful and loyal subjects, as yet unspoiled by art or civilization.

Blackbird.—The sable bird, with the yellow, dagger-like bill and yellowish eyelids, is prominent among our early Summer minstrels. His kinship with the Song Thrush is revealed in his whole manner and mode of life, in his nest, in his young brood, nay, even in his faithful wife, and his own song. His song is really in the main suggestive of the Thrush, but differs considerably in time and expression, and power and compass. His spouse always, and the young family of both sexes, have dark blackish-brown coats, and streaky, almost spotted, breasts; for Mrs. Blackbird is really no black bird at all, and is not infrequently mistaken for a Thrush.

The nest is mud-lined, as with the Song Thrush, but a layer of fine grass is added inside to form a soft and cosy bed for the eggs and young brood, and is usually placed a little higher from the ground than that of the Song Thrush, and in the centre of thick dense bush. He and she, too, are very shy creatures, but will defend their nest right valiantly, and even before the brood appears will sit closely on the nest until the marauder, harmless or otherwise, is almost within reach, when they go with a rush and chatter down the hedge-side or across the meadow, infecting all the small feathered creatures within earshot with their own alarm, and alight with a spurt and characteristic bobbing upwards of the tail at a safe distance. Five eggs are laid, and they are of a bluish-green ground colour, speckled all over with brown and purplish-

brown dots. Grubs, caterpillars, and pupæ form the principal food of this most useful bird.

Blackcap.—This charming and delicately attired Summer visitor has been called the Crown Prince of Song in deference to the acknowledged title of King of Songsters conferred by common consent, in prose and verse, upon the Nightingale. It is a study in grey and white; the former hue above, and the latter with a little ashy tint below, and in the male, a velvety black patch upon the crown which gives the species its name, but which in the female and young is represented by a patch of brown, and the upper hue of grey is also tinged with an ashy hue.

Many believe he is only placed second to the Nightingale as a songster through being heard at a disadvantage when all the host of feathered minstrels are trying to oust one another, whereas sweet Philomel is the grand soloist who commands the admiration of the hearer during the stilly hours of night, when Nature is slumbering in sweet and solemn repose. But the Blackcap's melody, wild and free and varied, is decidedly captivating and enchanting. As one writer has poetically put it:

> "He has caught from the Blackbird his rich mellow tone,
> From the Skylark his melody shrill,
> And the notes of the Woodlark, the Thrush, and his own
> He varies and blends at will."

He is known by the name Mock Nightingale in some localities.

The nest is placed near the ground in low, thick hedges, bushes, brambles, and shrubberies, and is composed of fibrous roots and grasses, intermingled with cobwebs and lined with fine rootlets and hair. From four to six eggs are laid, which vary somewhat in colouring, the most usual type being a ground colour of dirty white, blotched, spotted, and streaked with dark brown. The food consists of insects, larvæ, and various kinds of fruits and berries.

Chaffinch.—Who does not know and admire the Chaffinch? The multifarious localisms by which he is known prove his popularity. Here he is the Pie-Finch, there the Copper-Finch, elsewhere the Spink or Spinx, somewhere else the Shilfa, and yet again the Pink-Pink, to mention only a few of his cognomens. The latter is a good rendering of his Spring call-note. Fewer may know that his Latin cognomen is, being interpreted, the Bachelor Finch, illustrative of the habit of the hens separating from their lords and masters at the commencement of Winter, and gadding about the country in flocks until the following Spring. A handsome fellow is the male, vying in colour and marking with many of the denizens of foreign climes. Take him in brightest courting livery, and you find a leaden blue bill, followed by a deep black line on the forehead, the crown a greyish-blue, upper part of back rich chestnut merging into olive-green on the lower back, tail blackish-brown, boldly splashed with white, wings blackish, with narrow yellowish margins

on the outer webs of the feathers and splashed with white, with the lower parts a brick-red. The hen has all these markings in a minor degree, but blurred and suffused with ashy-grey all over.

The song is one of the prominent bird sounds of the countryside when Spring is advancing into Summer. It has been syllabized as: "Tol-de-lol, rol, chick-weeds," or "Tol, lol, lol, kiss-me-dear." Listen to the rivalry of the birds singing in the early Summer, and note the expression individual birds put into their strain. Some specimens finish up with a most expressive "kiss-me-dear."

The nest is placed a little distance from the ground in a hedge or low tree, a thick hawthorn hedge being a very favourite site, and is exquisitely woven together and fashioned, being decorated on the outside with scraps of local objects to make it blend naturally with its immediate surroundings, and oft-times render it quite difficult to discover. Four or five eggs of an ashy-grey ground colour, suffused with patches of reddish-brown, and spotted with dark brown and black, form the clutch.

Corncrake.—Few more characteristic bird-sounds are to be heard during the early Summer months than the constant and monotonous "crak-crak" of the Landrail, as the Corncrake would be more properly called. Its wearisome "craking" goes on with painful persistency far into the hours of the night. The bird haunts the long grass in the meadows, and when

driven thence by the mower among the fields is always reluctant to take flight. When disturbed he prefers to run about from one part of the field to another, taking a zigzag course, with frequent doublings and turnings, and when compelled to take the wing it is but a short and fluttering flight, just topping the hedge into the next field, which makes one marvel how the bird can manage the flight to its Winter home in the sunny South, and lends colour in the rustic mind to the old and erroneous belief that the bird hibernated during the Winter. The long neck of the bird and its ridiculously short tail give it a curious appearance on the wing.

It is something of a ventriloquist at times, and its "craking" will appear to come from different parts of the meadow in a bewildering way. The nest is simply a slight hollow in the ground, lined with leaves and dry grass, and in it are deposited from seven to twelve eggs of a reddish-white colour, spotted and blotched with reddish-brown and grey. Its diet consists mainly of various insect and larval pests of the meadows.

House Martin.—This bird is the Martin or Martlet, as it is also called, which has attached itself so closely to human dwellings, on which it fixes its mud-built nest. Its purplish-black upper parts and pure white throat, breast, and lower back suffice to distinguish it. His flight is less bold and sweeping, and in shorter curves, than that of the Swallow. He has a most enchanting and spirited little warble, which is only

Greater Whitethroat with Food for Young. *P.* 43.

Male Stonechat. *P.* 35.

heard at fairly close quarters. The sexes are alike in plumage. The exterior of the nest is built of mud, the inside being cosily lined with hay and feathers, and contains four or five white eggs when the clutch is complete.

A widespread superstition that the Martin brings good fortune to the occupants of the house on which it elects to build its nest often preserves the birds from being molested or driven away. It feeds solely upon insect pests, does an incalculable amount of good, against which there are no harmful qualities to be set-off.

In former years it was generally believed that the Martin and the Swallow tribe did not leave this country during the Winter, but that they retired to rocky caves, or descended to the bottom of the lakes and buried themselves in the mud, and in one or other of these conditions hibernated for several months at a stretch. Before houses were commonly built, these birds made their nests in caverns and upon cliffs, and in this primitive condition many may still be found nesting in various parts of the United Kingdom, which, together with the fact that occasional stragglers stay with us even as late as December, doubtless gave colour to the theory.

Sand Martin.—The Sand Martin differs mostly in colour and habitat. Its localisms of Pit Martin, Bank Martin, and River Swallow indicate its dwelling-places, for it lives in colonies, and inhabits quarries,

sandpits, and the like, where it bores tunnels in the soft sandstone in which to build its nest. The nest is placed at the farthest extremity of the tunnel, and is formed of straw, dry grasses, and feathers. From four to six eggs are laid, and these are of a smooth and glossy white colour. In colour the birds are mouse-brown above and white below, with a band of brown colour across the breast. This band is narrower in the female than in her mate, but otherwise the sexes are alike. The Sand Martin is pictured on Plate VII.

NIGHTINGALE.—In prose and verse few birds have been so idolized and sanctified with a halo of sentiment and praise as the Nightingale. Here he is shown us as a type of humility, and there as the suffering martyr, singing with his breast thrust upon a thorn. The song which has been said to "satiate the hungry dark with melody" gains immeasurably in the mind of the hearer when, as Shakespeare has it,

> "Warbled at eve, when all the woods are still,
> The liquid notes that close the eye of day."

In quite recent years the song has been transferred direct from the bird to a gramophone record, the only instance as yet of this feat being successfully performed.

When one has heard the enchanting music created by the bird, it must seem incomprehensible that man could have ever been so debased as to make an epicurean dish of the tongues of Nightingales, yet credible historians inform us that this was a custom in the days of

ancient Rome. Lord Lytton also refers to this excess in "The Last Days of Pompeii," when he makes one of his characters, in referring to the voice of the beautiful Ione, say, "She can feed only on Nightingale's tongues."

He is a Robin-like bird in build and manner, russet-brown above and buffish-white below, with a reddish-brown hue on the wings and tail. The female is rather duller, and has a greyish-white breast, and the young have grey-spotted breasts, which show their not very far distant relationship with the Thrushes.

The nest is built on or near the ground in brambles or tangled bushes, and is composed of dead leaves and grasses, lined with roots, vegetable down, and hair. Four or five eggs are laid, and these are of an olive-brown or greenish-olive hue. The male only sings until the eggs are hatched, but, if the brood is destroyed, they nest a second time, and again he sings until the baby birds appear.

NIGHTJAR.—A pretty study in mottled and marbled greys is the Nightjar. But his beauty is of the protective order, for he, or she, nests upon the ground with which the soft mottled plumage harmonizes so well that when he sits closely upon the ground he is most difficult to discover with the unaided eye. He knows the value of sitting still, and will allow one to almost step upon him, or her, before darting away in very crippled fashion, only to drop, apparently exhausted, a few yards distant. His injured condition is all sham, and

if you run to pick him up he will repeat the manœuvre just when you think you are going to put your hand upon him or extinguish him with your hat. When perching he almost invariably sits lengthwise upon the branch, and very rarely stands across it after the manner of birds generally.

His most popular local names are purely misnomers—the Goatsucker, Fern Owl, and Night Hawk—for he does not suck Goats, nor Cows either, for that matter, and he is neither an Owl nor a Hawk.

The peculiar pectinate middle claw probably assists him to disable and capture some of the large night-flying moths and beetles which form a part of his wholly insectile diet. He is a wholly beneficial item in the economy of Nature.

In habits he is nocturnal, and his eerie, churring, tremulous note begins at sun-down. No nest is made, the two eggs which form the clutch being laid in a depression on the bare ground, and their mottled and marbled greys on a white ground form an excellent protective colouring.

Meadow Pipit.—This species is more generally known as the Titlark. Though a resident species, its numbers are considerably augmented in Spring by migrants, and again decreased in Autumn by the same means.

It is a lover of the meadows, moors, and pasture-lands. Its flight is usually wavering, but at times becomes swift and undulatory. It sings when on the wing,

SAND-MARTIN.
Adult (Right), Young (Left).

fluttering upwards in the air for a good distance, and then descending on expanded wings and tail, uttering its somewhat monotonous and slightly metallic, but not unpleasing, song. It will also sing whilst sitting on the ground.

Its colour is a greyish-brown, rather darker above than below, and the throat and breast are spotted with blackish-brown. The female is less spotted, but is otherwise similar. Its favourite food consists of small beetles, caterpillars, and a variety of small seeds. It nests on the ground, and generally under a tuft of herbage, or on the side of a bank. The nest is made of moss, dry grass, and seed stalks, and is lined with fine grass and hair. Five or six eggs are laid, which are of a reddish-brown hue mottled with darker brown. It is often victimized by the vagrant Cuckoo to bring up young. In Scotland it is called the Moss-Cheeper.

Tree Pipit (Plate VIII.).—This Pipit is more arboreal in habits. But it loves best the grassy meadows skirted by a wood or coppice, or fringed with a row of trees. From one of the trees it mounts up some distance in the air, and, hovering, sings its pleasant little song, and then with raised wings and dangling legs descends in a delightful spiral curve very often to the position it rose from.

Its plumage has a more yellowish tinge than that of its cousin, but otherwise they are very similar, and show the same sexual differences. Its nest both in place and

materials is very similar to that of the Meadow Pipit. It lays four to six eggs of the usual Pipit type, but so variable in colour that it would be difficult to single out one as a reliable index.

Redstart.—The name is a corruption of the old English word "Steort," meaning "tail." Thus the Redsteort, or Redstart, is, literally, the Redtail. With the exception of the central pair of feathers, which are greyish-brown, the male has a fiery-red tail, the colour extending on to the lower back. The back, shoulders, and back of neck are lavender-blue, the top of head white, the forehead, face, and throat velvety-black, and the breast and lower parts red, fading into a pale orange on the thighs and greyish on the belly and under tail-coverts. The female is dull brown above and whitish below—not unlike a Nightingale. The male seems incapable of keeping still, and when not taking his short, jerky, and irregular flights is constantly bobbing and jerking his tail. His call is a "wheet,' and he has a very pleasing but low and soft song, which is frequently uttered from the top of a low tree or shrub. He sings most in the early morning and late at eve. The nest is built in a great variety of situations, such as holes in roofs, or rafters of old disused buildings, in fagot heaps, and holes in walls or trees. A hole in an old stone wall is probably the most favoured site. Five or six blue eggs are laid. The diet consists of insects.

Ring Ouzel.—Two of its local names—the Moor

Blackbird and Mountain Ouzel—convey a good idea of its habitat. Mountain wilds and moorland wastes, rocky glens and ravines, are the favourite spots of this bird.

His plumage is a brownish-black, broken only by a crescent patch of white across the breast, the "horns" of the crescent pointing upwards. The female is dark brown, and with her the crescent is greyish-white. The flight is straight and strong, with a bob up of the tail as the bird settles. The call is a "tack-tack-tack," in addition to which the male possesses a flute-like song, somewhat similar to that of the Blackbird.

It nests by the side of streams, on the ground, under cover of heath or grasses, on steep banks, shelves of rock, and similar places, and makes its homestead of coarse grass, heather, and twigs, lined with mud, and an inner lining of dry grass. Four or five eggs, rather more boldly marked than those of the Blackbird, but otherwise very similar, form its complement. The food consists of insects and larvæ, snails and slugs.

Stonechat (Plate VI.).—His local names of Stone-clink and Stonechatter are appropriate, for they fairly describe his "chack-chack" call-note, not unlike the sound of clinking two small pebbles sharply together. He is a well-known object on heaths and commons, where he may be observed sitting a-top the highest twig on some bush, or on the summit of a post, ever and anon darting off into the air and returning immediately to his point of vantage. There is method in the

performance, for he probably returns from each excursion with some winged insect, which was the object of his foray, and which he carries back to his starting-point to devour at leisure. The bird will often precede one for some distance along the side of a fence with short flights of a few yards, and then rests until the traveller again approaches him, when he goes another stage, each time uttering his clicking note as he darts off.

His plaintive song is rendered both from a stationary position and whilst the bird is hovering on the wing over a favourite bush.

The head, neck, and throat are deep black, the shoulders and lower back white, the upper back, wings, and tail dark brown, the wing feathers having darker centres and the coverts being tipped with white. The breast is a ruddy orange hue. The female resembles her mate generally, but the black parts have a brownish hue. The young resemble their mother, and the males only acquire their full beauties after their second moult.

The nest is placed at the bottom of a bush, and, though large for the size of the bird, is well concealed. It is made of dry grass and moss, lined with hair, wool, and feathers, and its complement consists of four to six pale bluish-green eggs, sometimes faintly spotted with reddish at the larger end.

Swallow (Plates V.).—When the aerial evolutions of this master-aviator are a common sight in our fields and meadows, be the meteorological aspect never so gloomy, we know that Summer is knocking upon our

TREE PIPIT AND MEADOW PIPIT.

gates. Not a single feather floating in the breeze is more buoyant than he with his wonderful mastery over the air. It is an engaging sight to see the parent Swallows enticing and encouraging their new-fledged young to take wing, and obviously instructing them in the art of aerial navigation.

Few birds have a greater wealth of mystery and superstition woven around them. We find them in Gray's "Pastoral" as weather prophets in the rhyming couplet:

> "When Swallows fleet soar high and sport in air,
> He told me that the welkin would be clear."

The Russian peasant says that the Swallow carries the warmth of Paradise to the earth. The Scandinavians call him the bird of consolation. Swallows nesting about houses is held to ward off lightning and fires, a superstition no more remarkable than the ancient belief introduced by Longfellow into "Evangeline" that if the young Swallows lose their sight whilst in the nest the parents have knowledge of some marvellous stone which they find and carry to the nest, and, touching the eyes of the young with it, restore the sight to them once again. In some places it is held to signify the dissolution of the person on whom it should alight, and if it should fly between the arm and the body paralysis would surely follow.

The subject is known to everyone, with his long sweeping wings and deeply forked tail. He is a little

larger than the Martin, but lacks the white under parts, and has a rather more sustained and pleasing twittering song. It feeds solely upon the insect pests of the air. Its nest is placed in a variety of situations, under roofs, among rafters of outhouses, stables, corners of windows, under eaves, and in chimneys. It is of similar material and construction to that of the Martin, but is rather more open at the top. Four to six white eggs, spotted with purplish-red, are laid.

Swift.—This bird has the distinction of being one of our very latest arrivals in Spring, and one of the earliest to depart for his southern home. Its sable hue has given it the name of "Black Swallow" in some places, whilst its note, which is a screaming "swee-reeee," has caused it to be known in country places as "Jack Squealer." Its life is almost entirely spent upon the wing—it eats, and drinks, bathes, and sometimes is believed even to sleep, upon his airy pinions. His legs are so short that he has some difficulty in rising from the ground, so that on the rare occasions when he alights he selects a wall, or tree, or some building from which he slips off clumsily when he again takes wing. The nest is built in high places on steeples, under eaves, on cliffs, trees, and the like, and two or three proportionately large white eggs are laid.

Yellow Wagtail.—A lover of the green pasture-lands is the Yellow Wagtail. He has the typical Wagtail gait and constant wagging of the tail, as he trips about among the feet of the grazing cows, or runs

closely around them as they lie ruminating in the meadows. The little bird is solely bent upon capturing and devouring the numerous pests which annoy the cattle.

He has a yellow head and a brownish crown, which serves to distinguish him from his relatives the Blue-Headed Yellow Wagtail, and the Grey Wagtail, both of which have yellow breasts like the present subject, and often get confused in identity. Its call-note is a "gee-up," which it utters as it starts upon one of its short, fluttering flights. The countryman knows him as the "Cow-Bird"—a nomenclature obviously acquired from its habits.

The nest is placed on or very near the ground, at the foot of a wall, on a bank, or under a tuft of herbage, and is composed of dry grass, moss, and fibrous roots, lined with hair, fur, and feathers. Five or six eggs complete the clutch, and these have a whitish ground colour, mottled more or less all over with ashy- and yellowish-brown.

Grey Wagtail.—The Grey Wagtail is a handsome fellow, with canary-yellow breast and under parts, a grey head and back, narrow white eye-stripe, black throat, and a green lower back. The rustic calls him the Winter Wagtail, though in some places he is known as the Yellow Wagtail. It has a rather longer tail, and is fonder of perching, than its congeners. The call-note is syllabized by the parleying terms "Who? He? 'Tis he! 'tis he!" The female is greener all over than her

mate, has a shorter tail, and very little, or no, black on the throat.

The nest is often built on a bank near running water, or on a ledge in a quarry, or shelf of rock, and is made of roots, dry grass, and moss, lined with cowhair. Its complement consists of five or six eggs, of a distinct pale bluish-grey mottled with very pale brown.

Garden Warbler.—A wee brown bird which sings melodiously from early morn to dewy eve in the smiling days of May. It often frequents cottage gardens, where its presence is not always appreciated.

It is much paler below than on the upper parts, and shares with the Greater Whitethroat the local name of Nettle-Creeper. The Fig Bird and Greater Pettychaps are other of its local names. Its flight is short and rapid. The song has been likened to a minor rendering of the Blackbird's given in a hurried and capricious manner.

The nest is built close to the ground, and is well-concealed in thick brambles, shrubberies, overgrown hedge-bottoms in gardens, and similar secluded places, and is a neat but frail structure of moss, rootlets, grass, and cobwebs, with a lining of hair. The four or five eggs are dirty white, clouded and spotted with shades of greenish-brown.

Reed Warbler.—Beside quiet secluded rushy streams, ponds, and the rushy margins of lakes or fens this bird will be found between April and September. He is a character in his way, and is one of

our very few species which build a suspended nest. He is a denizen of the reeds and rushes growing by the water-side, and when the nesting season arrives he selects two or three suitably situated reed stems growing near together in the water, and cleverly and securely suspends his deep, cup-shaped nest between them, fixing it firmly to the reeds so that the nest is carried upwards as the stems grow, and although when first built it is close to the surface of the water, later in summer it is elevated some little distance above it. Occasionally it will be found attached to willows or alders which overhang the water. The nest is built of reeds, grass, moss, wool, and hair. Four or five greenish-white eggs, marked and spotted with green and pale brown, are laid.

This bird is reluctant to appear in public, preferring to skulk among the growing reeds, now and again fluttering just over the reed-tops and again disappearing among them. When disturbed by an intruder into his domain he utters a scolding note, and often breaks out into his whistling song.

He is one of our night singers, from which fact he has doubtless got his local name of Night Warbler, and his song is heard at its best some hours after sunset.

Sedge Warbler.—Another of our night minstrels is the Sedge Warbler. It is as a mimic of other birds' songs and calls that it is most notable. Its own song is a strident, hurried, and vehement strain, and its freedom of song after sunset has often caused this bird

to be mistaken for the Nightingale. Osiers and similar localities are its favourite haunts, though it also visits the reedy and rushy banks of streams. Its nest is never suspended, and is placed on or close to the ground in its haunts, often at the foot of a thick bush, clump of osiers, or tuft of rank grass. It is a neat structure, but has no pretensions whatever to the extraordinary skill displayed in that of the Reed Warbler. It is made of stems of plants, moss, and coarse grass, with a lining of fine grasses and hair. Its complement is five or six eggs, of a pale brown hue, mottled, and sometimes streaked with darker brown.

Whinchat.—Upon "the wildest waste sae bleak and bare," and the furze and whin-clad commons, as well as arable and pasture-lands, the Whinchat may be met with. Though it nests on, or very near, and roosts upon, the ground, it will generally be observed by day sitting on the topmost twigs of hedge or bush, ever watchful for passing insects which form the chief food. Its dark brown head and face, contrasting with a broad band of white over the eye; pale orange-coloured neck and breast, shading off to a paler tint on the lower parts; grey-brown back and wing-coverts, with a black centre to each feather; a white band across the wing, and the tail boldly splashed with white, show that the epithet "pretty" is well deserved. The female is paler in colour than the male, and has a much smaller wing-bar.

The song is a "oo-tick, oo-tick, tac, tac, tac," from the opening notes of which he has probably got one of

his local names Eutick. He sings on the wing and when at rest. The nest is composed of straws, coarse grass, and moss, with a lining of fine grasses, and is approached by a mazy run. From four to six eggs are laid, which are of a pale blue hue, somewhat similar to the well-known egg of the Hedge Accentor, usually plain, but occasionally slightly spotted with brown.

Greater Whitethroat.—This bird is one of our commonest Summer visitors from across the seas. As you see it busily popping about in the hedges or skulking along the hedge-bottom uttering a scolding "shoo, shoo" it is simply a little brown and white fellow — the former hue on its upper parts, and white below—but a closer acquaintance would reveal a roseate tint among the white on the breast, which, however, is lacking in the female. It is a bold and fearless creature, and when it so persistently scolds and tries to "shoo" you away it probably has a deep personal interest in a secret spot in the thickest of the hedge-bottom, where, maybe, its mate is sitting in a neat but frail nest of fine grass and hair on five or six greenish-white and freckled eggs. Besides this "shooing" alarm note, and a short sweet song, it has a call of "cha-cha-cha." Where the hedges are flanked by beds of nettles is a favourite resort and it is frequently called the Nettle Monger, or Nettle Creeper. In the Midlands its common names are Jack Straw and Peggy Whitethroat. Its diet consists of various

winged insects and larvæ, to which is added a little ripe fruit when opportunity occurs.

Lesser Whitethroat.—This species is very similar in appearance and habits to its larger relative, than whom it is a trifle smaller and more slenderly built, and has black ear-coverts and a greyish back. It haunts the branches of trees and tall hedges, and its call is a "chick," and a trifling song of one or two notes, or changes on "zip-zip-zip." Its nesting habits are similar to the Greater Whitethroat, but it also adds bents of dry grass, cobwebs, and rootlets to its nest. It lays four or five whitish eggs, speckled, mostly at the larger end, with ashy-brown. The food consists of caterpillars, aphides, and insects generally, with a little fruit occasionally. The Brake Nightingale and Babillard are two of its local names not generally shared by the Greater species.

With this fairy-like spirit of the Summer days we close our record of some of the commoner forms of bird life of the Summer. That it is but a very incomplete account of all the multitudinous array of feathered life to be met with at this season is due rather to exigences of space than want of disposition.

CROSSBILL.
Male (Below), Young (Left), Female (Above).

CHAPTER III

BIRDS OF THE AUTUMN

How strange it is that the passing of the Summer days leaves no sense of sadness or loss upon our minds! Gradually, insensibly, as it were, we imbibe to the full the richness of Summer, and with minds satiate drift on to the maturer joys and blessings of the Autumn-tide as a natural consummation of our desires. True, as Wordsworth has so happily put it:

> . . . "Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her ; 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy."

And Autumn has its joys, and many beneficent gifts in store for every living creature. During the latter part of Summer the birds have for the most part been less vociferous and more retired in their habits. They have had a more important business in hand in attending to their house-making and the up-bringing of their charming children, and have had no time for song or purposeless gadding about. But their labours in this direction are almost o'er. Then it is that they once more break forth in song ; yet it is not the song of Spring-time. Some of the force and fire and ardent purpose seems to be wanting, and their place is taken by a more measured and thoughtful strain, which has a sweetness all its own. It seems to tell of efforts well

and truly performed. The Linnets will form most harmonious flocks, for they sing in unison, and few sounds are more enchanting on the country-side than the evening concerts often held by a company of Linnets. The antithesis of this sweet melody will be found in the riotous behaviour and birdy Billingsgate that seems to mark the retirement of the crowds of vulgar Starlings and the funereal denizens of the Rookery on their return from their daily foragings. The little family parties of Long-Tailed Tits, restless, wandering sprites, are joyous little creatures, and go their ways with a ceaseless merry twittering. But as the Autumn days draw on to the close, and are encroached upon by the mist-sodden breath of the on-coming Winter, a new element appears to enter into the strains of many of our sweetest vocalists. It is as the rendering of a solemn requiem to the bright and happy days that are slipping away from us and giving place to a cheerless, drizzling, and gloomy aspect of things generally. The Redbreast's parting odes are of a melancholy gladness. A strange paradox, yet true. There is all the rollicking joy and inspiring gladness in his lilting strains as of yore, but underlying all is a melancholy chord which imparts a sense of sadness to the performance, which is most difficult to analyze; for joy and happiness is still the predominating strain. It is harmoniously attuned to the dull, dark, misty days we know so well at this season, when

"On the nigh naked tree the Robin piped
Disconsolate, and thro' the dripping haze
The dead weight of the dead leaf bore it down."

But we must get on to an account of our birds of the Autumn, first of which in order is—

The Bullfinch (Plate XII.).—Massive and corpulent in build, it is, nevertheless, extremely well-proportioned. Its jet-black head, wings, and tail, which so perceptibly put on an extra glint of metallic sheen when Spring is at hand; its bluish-grey back, with a patch of purest white at the lower part; and its salmon-red breast, make it a strikingly handsome object of the country-side, or in the cottage gardens and orchards, where its room is generally more highly appreciated than its company, however much in æsthetic beauty its presence may add to the scene. For it is an inveterate bud-eater, from the time when the balmy breezes of early Spring begin to swell the buds into little plump prominences on the bare twigs until they are "out in the green." And now that Autumn has arrived, its heavy toll upon the small berries, wild or cultivated, matters not a jot to it. It will now begin to feed upon the seeds of agricultural weed pests. This bird has a perfect passion for the seeds of docks and sorrels, and if it kept only these weeds in check we should owe it a deep debt of gratitude. Both male and female are shy and retiring, keeping in cover of the hedges or trees, and constantly calling to each other with a "do-you" note, which is almost painfully plaintive and melancholy.

They have quite a charming lilting song. The female is a light russet, or drab, on the breast, and tinged with brown on the back. The nest is roughly constructed of slender twigs and roots, lined with fine rootlets, and contains four to six eggs of a bluish-white colour spotted with violet and brown.

Crossbill (Plate IX.).—When Autumn winds whistle loud and shrill we may occasionally come across a bird where fir-trees abound with much the build of the Bullfinch, and a certain similarity of colour, but having the clinging, acrobatic habits of the Tits. It is the Crossbill, a Winter visitor from the pine forests of the frozen North. Its mandibles nearly cross over each other at the tip, being twisted to this shape, as saith the ancient legend, by the bird's frantic efforts to withdraw the nails from the sacred rood at the Great Tragedy of Christendom, and being endowed thenceforth, as a reward for its sympathy with the Man of Sorrows, with the peculiarly crossed bill and blood-stained breast. It seems a marvel how the bird feeds. But it is no ordinary feeder, and his curious-looking bill is well adapted for extracting the seeds from the fir and alder cones, which form its principal food. Its call is "zip-zip," and it has a curious little song, which has been said to resemble in some degree that of the Starling. The female is yellowish where her mate is red, and the young males in their first year closely resemble their mother. The nest is composed of fir-twigs, dry grass, lichens, and wool, and its comple-

PLATE 10.

WHEATEAR.
Adult Male (Right), Female (Centre), Young in Autumn (Left).

ment consists of four or five eggs of a greenish-blue ground colour, spotted with brown.

Fieldfare.—Another immigrant from its northern Summer home which arrives at this time is the Fieldfare—the Pigeon Felt, Feltie, or Blue Bird, of the countryman in different places. The bluish hue of its lower back gives it the latter name, just as its generally greyish hue on the upper parts does the term of Grey Thrush, for it is really a Thrush, and shares with the Mistle Thrush the local name of Storm Cock.

It will remain with us until the very end of the Spring, going about in small straggling flocks, with its jerky, flapping flight and curious habit of alighting bolt upright, as it were, its tail depressed and head held up. Its song is not unlike that of the Mistle Thrush, and it sometimes sings a low strain whilst on the wing. The call is "yack, yack." The female is duller than her mate. In many parts of the country rustics believe two varieties—a larger and smaller—exist, and refer to the latter as the Feltie and the former as the Pigeon Felt.

Goldfinch. — Few birds, even those of foreign clime, have a greater wealth of colour than this most charming Finch, and his mate is scarcely less brilliant, yet he is, nevertheless, quite an accomplished vocalist, having a loud, sweet, and almost Canary-like song. His pinkish-white long bill, surrounded at the base with a narrow streak of jet black ; then a broad band of deep scarlet reaching as far as the hindermost margin

of the eye ; black nape ; white cheeks ; chestnut-brown back ; whitish breast, tanned down each side ; jet-black wings, with a large blaze of brilliant yellow, and small white tips to the larger feathers, and black tail tipped with white, give him an array of colour which to some extent justifies the country rustic's term of Seven-Coloured Sinner, by which he knows the Goldfinch. King Harry, Proud Tailor, and Thistle Finch are also local names bestowed upon him—the latter term indicating at once his favourite food and common habitat.

The nest is usually placed on the slender outermost bough of trees, evergreens, and large bushes, and is an exceedingly neat and cleverly woven structure of fine roots, grass, moss, and wool, frequently lined with willow-down. Four or five eggs are laid, and these are of a greyish-white hue, spotted with purplish and russet. The young, as their popular name (Grey Pates) implies, are tinged with grey all over, and lack the brilliant colours on the head, which do not appear until the first moult takes place.

Hawfinch.—The Hawfinch has the distinction of being the largest of our Finches. He is chestnut-brown above, tanned whitish below, with purplish-black wings and a black patch on the throat. The huge thick beak, of almost Parrot-like substance, will often serve to distinguish him. At this season his bill is rapidly losing the steel-blue hue which it has worn throughout the Summer, and will now be a light pinkish colour

until Spring returns. His mate has much less black on the throat, and the inner feathers of the wings are edged with grey. The song is a plaintive but not unpleasant strain of three or four notes on an ascending scale, and the call is a "click." The food consists of berries, seeds, and insects, and the powerful bill enables the bird to deal easily with such comparatively tough substances as beech mast and berries of the hawthorn. He is especially fond of green peas, and the havoc he will play with a fine row of these succulent dainties renders his visits to cottage gardens but ill appreciated. The nest is a large and rather loosely built structure of twigs, roots, and lichens, with a lining of fine roots and, sometimes, a little hair. Four or five greenish-grey eggs, spotted and streaked with brown and purplish, are laid.

Jay.—*Garrulus* in name, that being his generic cognomen, he is garrulous also by nature, and his harsh screaming "rake-rake-rake," given forth upon the slightest provocation, which spreads dismay far and wide among the feathered tribe, has earned for him the title of Sentinel of the Woods. His upper surface is brown, with a paler under surface, relieved by black moustachial stripes, crown mottled with buff, black, and white, the throat white, tail barred with blue, and the wing-coverts chequered with black, white, and blue; hence the local name of Blue-Winged Jay. The female is clad in similar garb. The bulky, cup-shaped nest is generally placed in the depths of the wood, preferably

in a fork of the lower branches, and is made of sticks and roots, with a lining of finer roots and grass, and contains from five to seven eggs of a pale dusky green, thickly speckled all over with light brown. The diet is of an omnivorous kind, comprising animal and vegetable substances; insects of all kinds, worms, snails, birds' eggs, and callow nestlings, acorns, and beech mast, in addition to other food.

Lapwing.—Better known to country folk as the Peewit, the bird that lays the Plover's eggs sold in the market, in these syllables tells its name to all denizens of the solitary wilds. Many renderings of its plaintive, whistling note serve as local names for the bird in different parts: "pees-weep," "weet-a-weet," "tee-wit." An ancient Scottish Act of Parliament is known of the time of Edward I., ordering all the birds' eggs to be destroyed when discovered, "in order that the Peesweeps may not go south and become a delicious repast to our unnatural enemies, the English." It is eminently a bird of the wild waste, where its sad, complaining, melancholy note is as the wail of a lost spirit in the wilderness. His greenish-black head, crest, and upper parts; white throat and breast; black wings, relieved with white tips; and white tail, tipped with black, all with a rich, sheeny gloss; make him a handsome fellow to look at. The nest is simply in a hollow on the ground, lined with grass and moss. When the birds are sitting on their eggs they become the veriest arch-hypocrites in feigning serious injury,

Photo, Rev. C. A. Hall.

Linnet's Nest and Eggs in Cabbage. *P.* 53.

flapping and tumbling about almost at one's feet, but always just beyond reach, until an intruder is beguiled away from the proximity of the nest to a safe distance, when the supposed invalid rises boldly on the wing and soars aloft, to the chagrin and disgust of the intruder, who realizes that his sympathy has been wasted upon a dissembler. Earthworms, slugs, snails, and land pests generally form its diet, and it is one of the most beneficial species we have. Four pear-shaped eggs are laid, which are arranged in the nest with the pointed end in the centre. They are olive-green in colour, blotched and mottled with black and brown.

Linnet.—This is a quiet brown bird, with a flash of white in the wings and tail—the latter only seen when the tail is spread as in flight—sometimes with rosy-red flashes about the head and breast. The rosy hues are the nuptial colours of the adult male. As a songster he is one of our most accomplished performers, and the chorus of song which a flock frequently send forth in the Autumn days, before finally retiring to roost, is one of the most enchanting country sounds at this season. Were it to be lost,

> "You'd miss upon the wayside course
> The twitterin' lintie,"

as Charles Murray truly sings in his beautiful poems, "Namewith." It has a rapid, wavy, dipping flight, displaying all the white in his wings and tail. The nest is a very neat structure of twigs, grass, moss, and

wool, lined with rootlets, hair, feathers, and thistle-down, and is built in a variety of situations, but most frequently in a furze bush or tall bushy hedge. Four to six eggs are laid, of a faint bluish-white, freckled with brown and purplish-red.

Nuthatch.—Bluish-grey above, buffish below, with a mixture of black, white, and grey in the tail, and a black stripe through the eye, will give the key for identification of the Nuthatch. Though a small bird, not more than $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches over all, its large pickaxe-like bill enables it to rifle the contents of such tough fare as barcelona or hazel nuts, of which it is very fond. It is interesting to watch the workman-like manner in which the bird fixes a nut securely in a crevice in the bark of a tree, and then hammers away head downwards to make a hole in the shell. Acorns, berries, beech-mast, and insects also form a considerable portion of the diet. By a peculiar conformation of the toes, this bird is able to run down the trunks of trees as readily as it goes up them, and in this way differs from the Woodpeckers and Creepers, which only work upwards. It perches lengthwise upon the branch after the manner of the Nightjar, and usually sleeps head downwards. The call is a human-like, shrill whistle: "whit-mit." The female resembles the male, but is less brightly coloured. The nest is placed in a hollow tree-trunk, and the entrance thereto is plastered up with mud, so as to leave just room for the birds to pass in and out, and is composed of dead leaves and

chips of bark. Five to eight white eggs, spotted with reddish-brown, are laid.

Robin.—To enter into a detailed description of the "pious bird with the scarlet breast" would be the veriest pedantry. For is it not

> "The bird which, by some name or other,
> All men know and call him brother"?

From our earliest nursery days he has been before us, as a special favourite of the Deity and mankind in general. Probably no other bird has such a halo of romance and legendary lore woven around it as the Ruddock, as Shakespeare calls him. In verse and legend the emblem of all the virtues, to hurt or destroy him, or rob his nest, is to bring just retribution, if not eternal punishment, upon the unfortunate head of the culprit. He is another avian minister to the Man of Sorrows, which fanciful fable saith derived his red breast as a reward for his sympathetic efforts to extract the nails from the Cross on Calvary. One of the most beautiful Welsh legends concerning it is thus happily expressed by Whittier in relating how an old dame chides her little grandson for throwing stones at the "holy bird."

> "Have you not heard,
> My poor, bad boy, of the fiery pit,
> And how, drop by drop, this merciful bird
> Carries the water that quenches it?
> He brings the cool dew in his little bill,
> And lets it fall on the souls in sin;
> You can see the mark on his red breast still
> Of fires that scorch as he drops it in."

His Autumnal lay has been well described as sweet, melancholy sadness, for through all the merry and bright trill there is a distinctly sad and melancholy strain. The bird seems to lament the passing of the fine, bright, and sunny days, and to be filled with concern for the hard times that may come upon him in the dull, dark, dreary days of Winter. And this sadness seems all the more poignant when the song is poured forth so late in the evening that the little singer is barely discerned through the grey, misty Autumn haze. He sings early and late—early to rise and late to retire is the keynote of his movements, and he will frequently be observed coolly taking a bath so late in the evening that many other species are already retiring for the night.

The nest is placed in a great variety of situations. Any old hat, pot, or kettle lying under a hedge is often selected as the nesting site, but it is also built in holes, under ivy, in the bottom of hedges, and on weed-grown ditches. It is a large and rather slovenly made affair of dead leaves, moss, and grass, lined with fine roots, hair, and feathers. From five to seven eggs are laid, and these are of a ruddy white, freckled with light red. The sexes are very similar, the female being a little paler in all her colours, and the red not spreading so far round the eyes and beak. It is a great mistake to suppose the female is a "plain brown body," as a would-be critic once tried to convince us. But the young, prior to their first moult, are very plainly

coloured, brown birds, with spotted breasts, showing their near relationship to the Thrush family—indeed, they are frequently mistaken for young Thrushes.

STARLING.—Who does not know this feathered comedian? His imitative faculties are so highly developed that he is quite a mimic in the wild state, not only imitating other bird songs and calls, and mixing them up indiscriminately in his own ludicrous medley of song, but he will catch other sounds and the human whistle, and perform these acquired notes with much fidelity from his favourite vantage-point, whether tree-top, house-gable, or chimney-pot. His rich metallic bronze blue and black plumage, thickly studded above with small triangles of buff-brown, and sheeny lustre, makes him a handsome fellow indeed. The female is scarcely less beautiful, but is more spotted, and her eyes have a brown iris, whereas those of her mate are black. At this season the birds gather into huge flocks containing thousands of units to share a common roosting-place, and a most interesting sight it is to watch them gathering together from all points of the compass, and hear the garrulous din and birdy chatter carried on for a time prior to settling down to rest for the night. He is one of the most valuable friends the farmer has, feeding very largely upon the tipula grubs, which do much damage to grass-lands, and a host of injurious insects of all descriptions. One may often see him perched upon the backs of grazing sheep searching among the fleece for ticks and insect pests.

The nest is placed in holes in walls and trees, and a variety of other situations, and is a slovenly assortment of grass, sticks, straw, paper, and rags, and contains in its complement four to seven uniform pale-blue eggs.

Common Tern.—Always elegant and graceful creatures as the Gulls and Terns are in all circumstances, they are particularly beautiful when seen flying together with a dark cloud as a natural background to show off their beautiful evolutions and airy flight. Though the sad sea waves are their true home and natural element, they sometimes go inland—a circumstance which is at once noted by the weather-wise, who believe implicitly the teaching of the proverb:

> "Seagull, seagull, sit on the sand;
> It's never good weather when you're on the land."

Our present subject is also known as the Sea Swallow. It is bluish-grey above, with a white nape and black crown, and whitish below. The black crown is now being broken by touches of white, which will remain throughout the Winter and disappear again in Spring. The Tern has a low skimming flight with occasional hoverings. It usually nests near together in companies, and the two or three stone-coloured eggs, spotted and blotched with brown and grey, are laid in a depression in the sand or shingle, with, at most, a few dry bents as nesting material, but generally nothing at all.

Tree-Creeper.—A mouse-like creature is the Tree-

Creeper, brown, spotted with whitish above; whitish buff below, slender bill, and a rather long tail furnished with stiff points at the end. It is common in nearly all woodland districts. The flight is direct and rapid, and is generally in a downward direction as the bird flits from the top of one tree-trunk to the base of another, up which it hops in a spiral curve, minutely searching every crevice in the bark for the larvæ and insects which form its sole food. When the bird reaches the top of the trunk, it flits down to the base of another, always working in an upward direction, and using its tail as a sort of bracket to support it in its upward climb. Of song proper it has none, but a few shrill calls resembling "tree, tree, tree." The sexes are alike in plumage. The nest is placed in a hole or crevice between the bark and the solid trunk, and when the entrance is too large for the bird's ideas of the fitness of things small twigs are woven across to narrow it. The nest is composed of bits of bark, grass, and twigs, lined with hair, feathers, and moss. Six to nine eggs are laid, and these are of a white hue freckled with light and dark brown.

Wheatear (Plate X.).—On the open downs where the wild thyme abounds is the favourite haunt of this charming and chaste-coloured bird, which has been called the English Ortolan, as well as such common terms as Clodhopper and Fallowfinch. The general colour of the upper surface is grey and brown, with a pure white patch on the lower part of the back, and the under surface reddish-yellow. A black patch surrounds either

eye. The throat is white, and the tail black and white. The bird has a low and dipping flight, which is usually commenced from some favourite vantage-point, as the top of a stump, wall, or small mound of some kind, and it ends in a series of hops. The call is a "chack-chack," in addition to which it has a monotonous, twittering song which is often uttered upon the wing whilst hovering over his mate, who is more soberly clad than her lord and master, being brownish on the upper parts and having a buff eye-stripe. Small beetles and insects of all kinds form its sole food. The nest is built in crevices, or under stones or clods, frequently in an old quarry, and is a loose collection of grass, bents and moss, lined with fur, wool, hair, and feathers. From four to six eggs are laid, and these are of a uniform pale greenish-blue, sometimes, but rarely, slightly spotted with red at the larger end.

Common Wren.—This favourite bird is one of our common and most widely distributed residents, and almost the smallest, being only about $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches over all, but the distinction of being the smallest belongs to the Gold-Crest, which is a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch shorter. Although so puny, the Common Wren, or Jenny Wren, has a surprisingly powerful song for so small a creature, and in the sweltering hot days of Summer and the spirit-sapping, icy blasts of Winter, the loud trilling notes may be heard. It often sings on the wing as it pursues its short, straight, dipping flight from bush to bush, tree, or hedge. It trips mouse-like along the hedgerows on

Photo, T. A. Metcalfe.

Male Bullfinch on Blackthorn. *P.* 47.

Photo, T. Malloch.

Nest and Eggs of Reed Bunting. *P.* 66.

insect prey intent, which forms its sole diet. In the Autumn days it will be found quartering the tree-trunks, posts, and stone walls, where caterpillars are apt to spin and attach their cocoons for the long Winter sleep, and the expert eye detects myriads of these now harmlessly passive pests which are forthwith rendered innocuous for all time by being promptly devoured by the capacious beak. Seen in the hedge-bottoms, it is a very sober insignificant creature, but at closer quarters its profusely barred plumage gives it a quiet beauty of its own. The upper parts are ruddy-brown, thickly covered with narrow bars of blackish-brown; the lower parts greyish-brown; there are two faint white bars on the wings, and the short, perky tail, saucily carried upright, is barred with black. It has a clicking call, not unlike the winding of a clock. The female is similar to the male, but is of a slightly paler hue. The large dome-shaped nest composed of moss, dead leaves, and lichens, lined with finer moss, hair, and feathers, the materials often being selected to harmonize with the spot where it is built, may be found almost anywhere—in holes of walls, trees, or posts, crevices of rocks, lichen-grown stumps, ivy, matted growths of foliage, and a great variety of situations. From five to ten eggs are laid, and these are white speckled with a few pale red dots.

As with the Robin, a great amount of fable and legendary lore is woven around the Wren, but, unhappily, in the case of the Wren it is not always advantageous to it. In the "Cornucopia," published

in the sixteenth century, it is given as an authenticated fact that they covered the bodies of unburied dead with leaves, to which belief Webster undoubtedly alludes in the lines :

> "Call for the Robin Redbreast and the Wren,
> Since o'er shady groves they hover,
> And with leaves and flowers do cover
> The friendless bodies of unburied men."

More happily still, the opportunities to test the truth of this gruesome story are wanting in our days.

Gold-crested Wren.—This is our smallest British bird. It has a brilliant orange-red blaze along the crown, and a black streak over the eye. The crest of the female is lemon-yellow. The spherical nest is composed of felted moss, wool, lichen, and cobwebs, lined with feathers, and is generally hung from a horizontal branch of some conifer. It contains six to ten eggs of a buffish-white colour, with a zone of light red at the large end. The Wren is called the King of all Birds, and legend tells us how he secured the dignity by means of a trick—secreting himself in the plumage of the Eagle when the contest was to be made which was to give the regal honour to the bird who flew to the greatest height towards the sun. The lordly Eagle easily outstripped all other competitors, and, having utterly exhausted his strength, was about to descend, when the Wren sprang out of his plumage, and, mounting a few feet above the Eagle, called upon the noble bird to witness that he alone had attained the greatest

height. The fact being incontrovertible, notwithstanding the subterfuge by which it was gained, the bird was forthwith elected King, and nows wears a dash of gold upon his tiny head as a symbol of his regal dignity. In taking leave of the royal unit we close our brief review of the birds of the Autumn.

CHAPTER IV

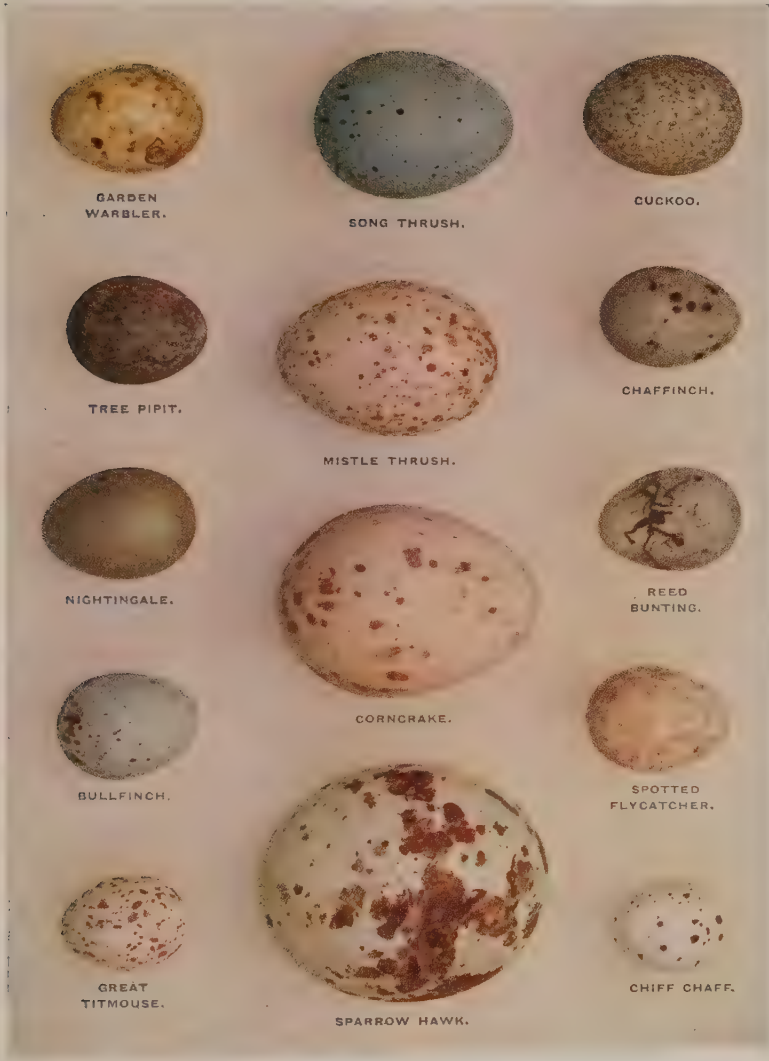
BIRDS OF THE WINTER

From time immemorial our feathered friends have been very commonly deemed weather-wise, and not without a certain foundation of reason is the supposition. For it is notorious that the careful student and close observer of the ways of the feathered folk may, with tolerable certainty, draw correct deductions of impending meteorological changes, which to the hypersensitive natures of the birdy populace "cast their shadows before," with much more definite and unmistakable effect than upon the dulled senses of civilized man. Thus when we hear that dirge-like note introduced into the Redbreast's lay, we may know that the fulsome Spirit of Autumn is playing no mere game of hide-and-seek, and concealing her mature beauties to-day only to bestow her smiles in greater abundance on the morrow. That her departure is a quick march forward has now been borne in upon the familiar bird, and he bemoans her passing. Ere long he will seek to renew our acquaintance upon

the window-sill, and then it is that the thrifty housewife in the North believes the time has come when the replenishing of the coal store must be no longer delayed, and the wood-stack piled afresh.

Already the great majority of our Summer visitors will have returned to a kindlier clime and sunnier skies, and the few belated Swallows will be daily gathering in solemn conclave, maybe discussing the meteorological prospects, and palpably growing more restless and anxious to depart. They are awaiting a favourable set of wind and weather, and one day soon their places will be sadly vacant and silent. But not for long. Quick upon the heels of the departure of these last stragglers of our Summer migrants will commence the rush from the North, and a fresh set of immigrant settlers will seek our hospitality for the Winter months. It may even be that the very wind which impelled those late stragglers to wing their way southwards has brought the vanguard of immigrants from the North, and peopled our hedgerows, fields, and heaths with a host of charming little Siskins—Wild Canaries, as some rustics will call them—Redpolls, and Bramblings, Buntings and Thrushes, and our coasts with a new multitude of wildfowl—flights of Ducks, and gaggles of Geese, in almost unlimited numbers. Yet even these are but the forerunners of the countless hosts that will arrive when, in very deed, grim

"Winter's hand
Spreads wide her hoary mantle o'er the land."



SOME BIRDS' EGGS.

Brambling.—A regular visitor to us throughout the Winter months is the Bramble-Finch, or Mountain Finch, as this bird is variously called, and is often to be found associating with its near relative, the Chaffinch, to which it bears no inconsiderable family likeness. He is a bold and beautiful fellow, wild and shy, and ever distrustful of man. Stress of weather may drive him to seek temporary relief at the garden feeding-table, where he contrasts strangely in manner with the gentle, well-behaved Chaffinch. But he will never show the least sense of gratitude for your charity by becoming tame and sociable. Neither will he be likely to seek your favour as long as he can turn up a beech-nut in the rustling bed of dead leaves beneath the trees, which the improvident Hawfinches have with wasteful prodigality dropped and ignored. Beech mast, berries, and all kinds of seeds and grains, form his food when with us, but in his Summer haunts he becomes an expert fly-catcher during the nesting-time. His plumage, too, will undergo a change, for whereas his crown and upper parts of neck and back are black with a lacework of brown at this season, in Summer they will become a solid jet-black hue from the beak to the commencement of the patch of white on the lower part of the back. The wings are black with bars of whitish-fawn, the tail black, and the throat and breast orange-fawn, with blackish spots on the flanks. The female is smaller and duller than her mate. The flight is rapid and undulating, and the call a flute-like "chip-

away," but its pretensions to song are of a low order. Its five to seven eggs are of a bluish-green tint dotted with brown.

Reed Bunting.—A very Sparrow-like bird in appearance, but with brighter browns and more distinct dark pencillings on the body, and a jet-black head, face, and throat, such is the Reed Bunting. Though soberly clad, he is really a pretty bird, and may be met with at this season searching the fallows and stubbles, in solitary state, for fallen grains and insects of any kind which form his chief food. He has a whitish eye-stripe, and the lower parts are also whitish-grey. This bird must not be confused with the true Black-Headed Bunting. The Reed Bunting stays with us all the year round, whilst the Black-Headed species is only a very rare straggler to this country, and bears a totally different appearance, the black throat being lacking, and the breast and under parts are yellow instead of white. The female Reed Bunting has a reddish-brown head and throat, and at this season the black parts of her mate are slightly edged with brown. It has little claim to being a vocalist, having a monotonous, oft-repeated single note and a drawling note to wind up with. It is chiefly a bird of the waterside, favouring quiet brooks, and ponds, and marshy places, and building its nest of dried grass, moss, bents, and leaves, lined with fine grasses and hair, in swampy places either on the ground or low down at the foot of osiers or tangled grasses. Four or five eggs are laid, and these are of an ashy-

grey hue streaked and spotted with purplish-brown (see Plate XII.).

Snow Bunting.—This is a Winter visitor, and occurs in numbers only during exceptionally severe weather, but stragglers may be met with on moors and heaths every year, and a few pairs regularly breed in the Highlands. Its Summer haunt is in the Arctic Circle, and it nests as far north as Grinnell Land. The general plumage is white, speckled above with black and brown, and the wings and tail are intermingled with white, blackish, and brown. The female has all brown markings, being minus the black hues. It has a fluttering, butterfly-like flight, and calls and sings its melodious little warbling song upon the wing. On the ground it runs after the manner of the Larks. Its food consists of the seeds of grasses and weeds and a variety of larvæ and insects. The nest is placed on the ground among stones or in crevices of rocks, generally in lonely places, and often on mountain-sides or on the summit, and is made of roots, grass, and moss, lined with hair and feathers. From five to seven eggs are laid, and these are of a greyish-white, blotched and spotted with brown. The bird is often called the Snow-Flake, Oat-Bird, or Mountain Finch.

Kingfisher.—This is probably the prettiest of all our native birds. The back and upper surface are a steely metallic blue ; the head black and blue ; a white spot on the sides of the neck ; the throat white, breast

and lower parts light ruddy chestnut. The tail is short and stumpy, and the beak stout, wedge-shaped, and very long in proportion to the size of the bird, which is about 7 inches over all. A brilliant lustre suffuses all its hues, so that to fully appreciate its beauty the bird has to be seen as it darts along just above the surface of some sunlit brook, its sapphire hues glinting in the sunshine like some jewelled meteor, or as it sits on some overhanging naked branch or stump philosophically gazing into the stream. It haunts quiet reaches of rivers, brooks, and freshwater lakes and ponds, subsisting upon the smaller fry of the finny tribe and aquatic insects. Minnows are its favourite food, though it is often charged with being a natural enemy of trout fry and ova. It dives in the water to secure its prey, carries it to a favourite point of vantage, and kills it with a bang or two against its perch before bolting its remains head foremost and entire at one gulp. Its note is a shrill "pip-pip-pip" uttered on the wing. The nest is in a hole in the brookside, generally a deserted hole of a Water Vole. The only nesting material is a little heap of fish-bones and pellets of the indigestible portions of their food ejected by the birds—a dirty and often malodorous nest for so lovely a bird to tolerate. Six to eight almost globular eggs of a glossy white colour are laid, through the shells of which the yolk shows, giving a slightly pink translucent hue to the eggs. The sexes are alike, but the female is rather duller in colour, and has less metallic sheen. It

Mistle-Thrush on Nest. *P.* 78.

Photo, T. Malloch.

is the Halcyon of the ancients, and is extremely rich in legendary lore. Who has not heard of the legend of Ceyx and Halcyon? How the former, King of Trachyn, put out to sea to consult the oracle at Claros, whilst his devoted wife prayed at home for his safe return, and, learning from Morpheus of his shipwreck, rushed to the shore only to see the body of her beloved floating upon the cruel waves, and, springing forth to embrace it, was immediately transformed into a bird, and the Gods, taking compassion on her, wrought a similar change in the body of her husband, so that, as Kingfishers, they might be again reunited and their love remain unchanged. Thenceforth, when they brooded their young upon the face of the waters, the sea remained calm, and the passage of the deep was safe. Hence arose the belief in Halcyon Days, when the waves are quiescent, the seven days immediately preceding and succeeding the Winter solstice.

Barn Owl.—This bird is better known as the Screech Owl, and is the commonest of our Owls. It has a complete facial disc, a circumstance that may have been the cause of its local name, Cherubim. The upper surface is a tawny-buff colour with darker mottling, the face and under parts whitish, and the beak yellow. The talon-like claws are black, and the middle one is serrated. Like most of its tribe it is a nocturnal creature, and has a steady, gliding, silent flight. The note is a hoot, but it also hisses and snores, and occasionally utters a loud, prolonged screech as it flies. The latter

note occasions much anxiety in the peasant mind, for it is religiously believed to augur an impending death in the household over which it may be passing when its scream is heard, or the speedy dissolution of the person or some very near relative when it should happen to screech in its aerial passage from point to point in quest of prey. Its principal food consists of Mice, Voles and Rats, and man has few, if any, more valuable allies in exterminating, or keeping in check, these destructive pests. Occasionally it preys upon Beetles and a variety of other insects, as well as Moles and Shrews. The nest is placed in a variety of secluded places—church towers, ivy-mantled ruins, hollow trees, and the like, and is composed of decayed wood, or any rubbish found on the spot, pellets disgorged by the birds, and sometimes moulted feathers. Three to seven white eggs are laid, generally with an interval of rest between each pair, so that eggs and young, or young of varying ages, are found in the same nest.

Tawny Owl (Plate XV.).—This species also has a complete facial disc, but it differs from the Barn Owl in being larger, having reddish-brown plumage on the upper parts and much white below, the whole boldly streaked and spotted with a darker colour. The feet are also feathered down to the claws. It is known as the Wood Owl, and is the one that gives the well-known cry: "Quotha! tu-whit, tu-whoo-oo-oo-o." It lives in a tree or ivy-clad ruin, and never comes forth until darkness has fallen. It has the soft silent flight peculiar

to the tribe. The nest is generally placed in a hole, but is sometimes found in an old nest of Dove, Crow, or Magpie. Three or four large white rounded eggs are laid. Rats, Mice, young Rabbits, birds, and similar prey form its chief food. In the Owl tribe the female is the larger and bolder bird.

Puffin.—A curiosity in many respects is the little Auk-like bird, about twice the bulk of a domestic Pigeon, with blackish-brown upper parts; white lower parts and sides of face; and a dingy white collar around the neck, that one sees in the Summer months sitting solemnly erect at the mouth of a hole on some islet or among the cliffs on the seashore. It has the webbed feet of a Duck; very short, strong wings; a round head; the short, stiff tail and upright pose of a Penguin; and a ridiculously showy and unwieldy bill many sizes too large for the bird's convenience, or so it would appear. The gaudy caricature of a bill is covered with horny, excrescent ridges of pink and yellow. The owner is the Puffin, and as he sits there in solitary state he is in all probability guarding the nest on which his mate is sitting, or the one solitary baby which forms its brood whilst the mother-bird is away fishing for its hungry maw. In Winter both he and his mate lose the showy colour of the beak, which is a nuptial adornment. Sea Parrot and Tom Noddy are two of its many local names. It has a heavy, whirring flight, but is an expert diver, and able to fly long distances under water. The call is syllabized as "or-r"

or "orr-a-orr." Its single white egg is frequently laid in a rabbit burrow, with at most a scanty bed of grass as the only nesting material. The female has a smaller bill than her mate.

Lesser Redpoll.—Why this extremely natty and merry little bird should be called the French Linnet is hard to tell, unless it be that its versatility and *bon homie* are suggestive of the Gaul. It is known in various parts as the Pea Linnet and Chevvy Linnet. It is our smallest Finch. Though soberly clad it is a pretty little creature. It is but little larger than the Wren, but it is more slimly built, and fashioned on the lines of the Linnet as regards shape. The general colour is a rich nut-brown, rather lighter on the under parts, and somewhat speckled, especially on the back and shoulders, with black. The throat is pinkish, with a prominent black chuck at the base of the lower mandible, and the crown is a brilliant red. The breast and sides and lower parts of the back of the adult male are suffused with deep pink, which becomes much more pronounced and brilliant when the birds are nesting. Its jerky, swimming flight is often accompanied by a few chattering notes at the commencement and a prolonged trill as it gets under way. It has a very pretty warbling song of low power, which requires fairly close quarters to be heard properly. Seeds of weeds and grasses, aphides, and small insect pests form its food. The nest is a very neat structure of small twigs, grass, and moss, lined with willow down, hair, and some-

times feathers, and is generally placed in the low bushes and hedges, willows or elders, near the margin of ponds and brooks. From four to six pale bluish-green eggs, freckled with brown at the larger end, are laid.

Little Owl.—This Owl is not incorrectly named, for it is almost the smallest Owl we have, being barely 8 inches long. It is doubtful if it ever visited this country of its own accord, but is known to have been imported and set at liberty on a number of occasions, and is probably rapidly gaining a footing as a naturalized Briton. It is greyish-brown above, whitish with brown streaks below, and the tail is barred with white. Contrary to the usual custom of his tribe, the Little Owl may frequently be found abroad by day.

Its nest is placed in hollow trees, and is merely a slight scratching of rubbish. The white eggs are the smallest of any of the British Owls. The cry is syllabized as "cuckoo-vah-ee."

Ring Dove.—A familiar denizen of the cultivated lands, and one whose presence is rarely appreciated, is the Ring Dove—the Queest, or Wood Pigeon, of the rustic. It is very similar in colour and build to a common blue domestic Pigeon, but a little larger in size, and has white patches on the sides of the neck, and white wing-bars, which serve to distinguish it on the wing from its congeners. The bill is yellow at the tip and red at the base.

Its flight is light, buoyant, and deliberate, and its movements on the ground strutting and dandified, the

bird bobbing the head with each step as it pertly struts about.

It collects in flocks in the autumn and winter, and visits the fields of growing grain and roots, where their forays are regarded with an anxious eye by the farmer, who will draw a pathetic word-picture of the deplorable loss occasioned by their depredations—how they "steals the corn, feed ravenously on the whuts, an' gits all over the place, an' spiles the turmits." Thus he will lament their ravages as he leans over the gate of his "turmit" field, shot-gun in readiness, waiting for the marauders to appear, with malice in his heart and murderous intent oozing from every expectant muscle should the Cushat appear. But he is a wary bird, and is not easily caught napping.

That the farmer has good cause for complaint when great flocks descend upon his fields is beyond doubt, for the birds destroy far more of the roots than they consume by pecking out the green centre, making a deep hole wherein water collects, and frost steps in and completes the destruction of the root.

Our Scottish neighbours call him the Cushat Doo. The note is a "coo-oo-oo, coo-oo-oo." The female has a fainter white collar than her mate, but is otherwise similar.

Although a bird of the country and woodlands, it is often found on the outskirts of towns, and breeds regularly in the Metropolitan area. The nest is placed in trees or very tall hedges, and is merely a slight plat-

form of twigs, through which the two oval white eggs can often be seen.

Siskin.—This bird is often called the Wild Canary, though its claim rests on no better a base than the very Canary-like general colour of its plumage. It is the same size as the Lesser Redpoll, and has a similar black chuck on the chin. But here the resemblance ends, for the Siskin has a jet-black crown, and the upper parts are yellowish-green streaked with black; the throat and breast yellow, shading into white on the belly, the flanks streaked with black, and the wings and tail a mixture of black and sulphur-yellow. The female has a brown crown, no black chuck, and is duller in all the other colours, and rather smaller than her mate. It is a Northern breeding species, nesting in the pine-forests, and only migrating to our Southern counties when driven by stress of weather. Then it often becomes common and widely distributed in the English counties for a time. It nests regularly only in Scotland. The nest is built in fir-trees or furze bushes, and is made of roots, grass, and moss, lined with Rabbit's fur. Four or five eggs are laid, and these are of a bluish-grey spotted with reddish-brown. Its note is a "tit-tit, tit-tit," and it has a lilting, twittering song. The bird is very partial to the seeds of the alder and various small berries, which it supplements with the same kind of food as the Redpoll.

Jack Snipe.—This species is not, as was formerly considered, the male of the Common Snipe, which was

termed the "Jill" Snipe, and which is a resident with us all the year round. It is a different species which inhabits the Northern latitude, and only comes here at the beginning of Winter, and provides sport for the predatory gunner until about April, when it again departs for its breeding haunts. It differs from our resident species in being decidedly smaller, wearing a glossy purple mantle, and having the inside webs of the scapulars a glossy green.

House Sparrow.—A study in browns and greys is sufficiently descriptive of this cheeky parasite upon man. He has been called an incorrigible Ishmaelite, written of as the Avian Rat, as an irreconcilable brown thief, and his character has been whitewashed times without number, and made to appear as that of a bird of probity and a model of virtuous rectitude. He is a character in his way, progressing on the ground by hops and jumps, with now and again a few steps of walking gait, rolls in the dust after the manner of fowls to clean his plumage, carries his tail high in wet weather and droops it in dry. "Philip, get up, Philip," is his note. His voracious and omnivorous appetite makes him a very useful scavenger in towns and cities. The female lacks the black patch on the throat and the grey crown. The nest is a large, untidy mass of miscellaneous substances, cosily lined with feathers, and is built in crevices of buildings, leads, outhouses, and in trees—when in trees it is usually domed. Five to seven eggs of a pale bluish-grey, speckled and

Photo, P. Hanley.

Young Sparrow-Hawk. *P.* 75.

Photo T. Malloch.

Tawny Owl. *P.* 70.

PLATE 15

mottled with lilac and brown, are laid. There is, however, a good deal of variation in the markings.

Tree Sparrow.—This species must not be confused with the House Sparrow, from which it differs in being perceptibly smaller, having a brown crown and a black patch behind the whitish ear-coverts. It is more a bird of the country and the fields. Its song has been syllabized as "see-you-eat," and its call is a "chirrup." The female is like her mate. It nests in holes in trees, the crowns of pollard-trees, crevices in quarries or rocks, and occasionally in the thatched roofs of out-buildings. When not under cover the nest is domed, and is built of similar materials to that of the House Sparrow. Four to six eggs are laid, and these are of a greyish-white colour spotted and splashed with dark grey and brown. The colour and markings are more constant in this species than are those of its commoner relative.

Sparrow Hawk.—One of the commonest of the Falcon tribe is the Blue Hawk, or Pigeon Hawk, as this bird is variously called, and as powerful and noble a fellow as he is bold and predacious. He is justly feared by all the small feathered folk, as well as by Rats, Mice, Voles, young Rabbits, and Hares. Like most of his tribe his flight is a marvel of aerial evolutions, swift and gliding, with long, sweeping undulations, rising and falling, and mostly low down near the ground, the bird quartering the fields along the hedgerows and clearing the hedges in bold, easy curves as it passes from field

to field, and occasionally soaring aloft, and hanging in mid-air upon quivering wings and tail. It threads its way through woodlands and the boughs of the trees in pursuit of its prey with amazing dexterity for so large a bird. The general colour is greyish-blue above and buff below, barred with rufus-brown. There is a white patch upon the nape, and the tail is barred with light and dark brown bars. The female is larger than her mate, is greyish-brown above and whitish below, and she has an orange-coloured iris, whereas that of the male is yellow. It makes a rather bulky nest of sticks and twigs, lined with rootlets and moss, in the fork of the main trunk of a tree, or one of the larger boughs, on rocks and cliffs, and occasionally in the deserted nest of a Jay or Crow. Five whitish eggs are laid, and these are handsomely blotched mostly at the larger end with reddish-brown. The note is a shrill, screaming "mew."

Mistle Thrush.—This is the largest of our Thrushes, and one of our best Winter songsters. Not that his song is particularly musical, but being heard when bird-song is scarce, and the elements wild and raging, it seems more in tune with the season, and has a beauty all its own ; wild and free, it seems to blend with the fierce, warring elements. It is also known as the Storm Cock and Thrice Cock. In colour it is brown above and buffish-white below, with numerous triangular dark-brown spots. It is larger and greyer than the Song Thrush, and the female is greyer than

her mate. It utters a loud screech on the wing, and the song is a mellow "chirr, wheep, wheep, whirrow, whirrow, wheep."

The nest is placed in the fork of a large tree, and is composed of twigs and lichens, lined with mud, and an inner lining of fine grass. Four to six eggs are laid, and these are of a greenish-white hue spotted with chestnut and brown (see Plate XIV.).

Blue Tit.—This bird is the Tit with which we are all so familiar, and which amuses us with its clever acrobatic feats. Where nut kernels are threaded on string and suspended, and fat-bones hung up outside, the antics of these birds afford endless amusement. The upper parts are greenish-blue, the lower parts greenish-yellow, with light-blue crown, edged with white, and white cheek-patches. The song is a "chee, chee, chicka, chee," with an occasional prolonged "churr-r." It also has a call-note of "tzi, tzi, tzi." The female is duller than the male.

The nest is placed in a hole in almost any conceivable situation, and is a loose mass of grass and moss, lined with hair, wool, and feathers. From seven to ten or twelve eggs are laid, and these are white spotted with light reddish-brown.

Coal Tit.—This species has a coal-black head. Its back is olive-brown; there is a white patch on the nape and two white bars on the wings. It is slightly smaller than the Blue Tit, and has a short and fluttering flight, and the usual clinging habits of the Tits, but is scarcely

such an accomplished acrobat as the Blue Tit. Its call is a "che-chee." It stays with us all the year round, and is a frequent companion of the Blue Tit on the Winter bird-table. It nests in a hole in a wall, tree, dead post in a hedgerow, or a deserted mouse-hole in a bankside. It lays six to nine eggs, and nest and eggs are both quite similar to those of the Blue Tit.

Great Tit.—This species has a coal-black head, face, and throat, relieved by large white cheek patches, and a black line extending down the breast from the throat to the tail. It is often called the Oxeye, and in some parts is known as Joe Bent. The female is similar to her mate, but less bright in colour. The notes are metallic, piercing, and bell-like, and force themselves upon the ear. They have been likened to the sound of sharpening a saw, which is a fairly close description. The call-note is "teeta-tee."

The nest is placed in a hole in a great variety of situations, and is composed of felted grass, moss, hair, feathers and wool. Six to ten eggs are laid, and these are of a yellowish-white colour, blotched with light brown.

The food of all these Tits consists of the pupæ and larvæ of Moths, and fruit-tree pests, and all kinds of small insects, to which they add anything that can be met with in Winter when insect food is scarce. Altogether they are among the most useful birds we have.

Long-Tailed Tit.—This is a fairly common and widely distributed bird in the English counties, but is

KINGFISHER.

less often met with north of the Clyde. The Summer broods stay together through the Autumn and Winter, so that it is usually met with at this time going about in small family groups. Its long, pendulous tail, narrow white stripe on its otherwise black crown, and wings and tail boldly splashed with white, will identify it, if its merry, ceaseless, chattering "te-te" or "tse-tse-tse," as it pops about from bush to bush, fails to do so. It is a wandering Jew among birds, always moving about, and rarely staying long in any place. Its nest is a very beautiful domed structure, oval-shaped, with a small hole for entrance near the top. It is composed of moss, lichens, wool, and cobwebs, cosily lined with hair and feathers. Its name of Bottle Tit is clearly derived from the type of its nest. The six to twelve eggs are a greyish-white hue faintly marked with light red and purple. The food consists of any kind of small insects.

Marsh Tit.—This species is sometimes called the Willow Biter or Smaller Oxeye. It has no white wing bars, or white on nape, the latter part being greyish-black and the upper parts greyish-brown. It stays with us all the year round, but is rather uncommon. The call is "ti-ti-ti," and its note has been syllabized as "sis, sis, sis, would-ye, would-ye." The female is like the male. The flight is short and fluttering. The nest is placed in hollow tree-stumps in marshy places, and is a felted mass of moss, wool, fur, and willow down. Six to eight greyish-white eggs are laid, and

these are clouded and freckled with brown. The food consists almost solely of insects.

Twite.—This bird is also called the Mountain Linnet. Its native habitat is the moor and mountain wilds of the North, and it is an uncommon species in the Southern counties. It is said to be more plentiful in the Outer Hebrides than anywhere, and large flocks are met with on the Isle of St. Kilda. It chiefly differs from the Linnet in being slightly smaller, brown on the crown and throat, and reddish on the lower part of the back. The female has no red on the back, is tawnier above, and buffer below, than the male. The call is a "twa-it," somewhat resembling its name, in addition to which it has a twittering, Linnet-like song.

The nest is placed on or near the ground among heather or furze, and is neatly made of heather twigs and grass, lined with hair, wool, and thistledown. Four to six bluish-white eggs are laid, and these are spotted and slightly streaked with reddish-brown and purple.

Seeds of grasses, weeds and moor and mountain plants, form its principal food, to which it probably adds aphides and minute insects generally.

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